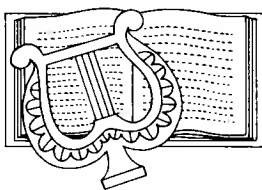


ONE IN A THOUSAND

BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD.



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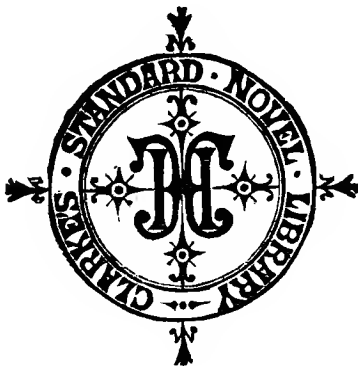
ONE IN A THOUSAND

BY

W. STEPHENS HAYWARD,

AUTHOR OF

'THE BLACK ANGEL,' 'STAR OF THE SOUTH,' 'THE FIERY CROSS,' ETC.



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IDOL'S EYE.

ONE IN A THOUSAND.

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ONE IN A THOUSAND.



CHAPTER I.

A DAUGHTER TO MARRY.

THE Christmas festivities at Hadlow Castle were in active course of preparation. Already had most of those who had been invited to enjoy the princely hospitality of Lord and Lady Linstock taken up their quarters in the fine old mansion; and those who were yet to come were such as merely contemplated paying a 'flying visit,' being regarded as social birds of passage, ever on the wing.

Hadlow Castle was one of the magnificent baronial residences which, for the most part, are in the possession of noble lords who can trace their descent from the date of the Norman Conquest, when, in order to achieve security and live in peace, it was necessary to construct fortresses of immense strength, crowned with lofty turrets, from which flaunted feudal banners.

Around Hadlow there was a moat, which Lord Linstock would not have filled up, although his family physician, a man of eminence and renown, repeatedly told him that the water it contained

engendered damp, and the noisome gases exhaled from it at night were unhealthy in the extreme.

The moat was fed by a small stream, which in Scotland would be called a burn, but in the west of England, that balmy and fertile region, aptly called the modern Eden, it was poetically described as a rivulet.

Lord Linstock was essentially a City man. He dined with Lord Mayors, and presided at dinners of every description, while he entertained aldermen in a way that was so truly gratifying to those worthy gentlemen that, if his lordship had chosen to stand for the City of London, he would have been returned by an overwhelming majority.

In the City they do not care much about poor lords; but a rich peer of the realm, with plenty of money at his back, is a Triton amongst the minnows, and worshipped as a sort of Philistine Dagon, an apostle of Mammon, and high priest of the money-market.

Amongst Lord Linstock's intimate friends was Mr. Sandford Saville, the manager of the Royal Bubble Bank. People said that he had been one of its most ardent promoters, and that a good deal of money passed into his hands when the concern was fully established, recognised by the committee of the Stock Exchange, and marked in the official list at one and a half premium.

Sandford Saville was a sharp shrewd man of business. He had come to London about five years before the establishment of the Royal Bubble Bank. No one knew much about him, but he had some money, and was in connection with several well-known Australian houses. In time he became a director of the Valley of the Euphrates

Company, and knocked up an acquaintance with Lord Linstock at the board.

This acquaintance ripened into intimacy, and Mr. Saville prevailed upon his lordship to allow himself to go forth to the world as the chairman of the Royal Bubble Bank.

The bank was established in March, soon after the assembling of Parliament, and had endured for the best part of a year.

When Christmas came round Lord Linstock invited the manager to Hadlow Castle; and, accordingly, Mr. and Mrs. Sandford Saville, Miss Felicia Saville, their only daughter, and Mortimer Saville, the eldest son, went into the west of England, and enjoyed the hospitality of the commercial peer.

Felicia Saville was a charming girl. She narrowly escaped being perfectly beautiful. Her chief peculiarity was a *triste* expression, a sad mournful air, which she was only able at times to shake off, and which, in her lonely and solitary moments, was quite pitiful to behold. Those who knew her either said that this melancholy was constitutional, or that she was brooding over something which had happened to her in her early career, before she came to London.

She was very fair, and had those well-defined, almost angular, features which so strongly characterised the beautiful Eugénie, Empress of the French. Her hair was long and silky; her complexion white as alabaster; her hands, her feet, her mouth small and delicate; her figure elegant; her manner extremely ladylike and refined.

Mrs. Saville, her mother, was proud and haughty, even to the verge of rudeness; but even

she at times showed the same symptoms of melancholy which in her daughter were so palpable. She was reserved, and seemed to be wrapped up in a cast-iron coating of self which formed an impregnable castle of individualism.

Mortimer Saville was under Government. He enjoyed the barren honour of a clerkship in the Bellicose Department of the Belligerent Office, an institution in Pall Mall, where the business of our standing army is carried on.

His younger brother was what is called a black sheep. He was good for nothing—so his friends declared. They had given Michael up. No one took him by the hand. He did not even live in the paternal mansion in Berkeley Square. His father refused him a halfpenny when he once came to him with a request for twenty pounds to set up as the proprietor of a roadside beershop.

Michael was incorrigible. Every one said he was thoroughly worthless, and more than one person prognosticated that he would one day fill an elevated position; but whether they meant, by that figure of speech, that he would become Lord Chancellor, and sit upon the woolsack, or whether he would dangle from a gibbet, it is difficult to say, as it is impossible to interpret ambiguous phrases with any certainty. One thing was undeniable, and that was that Michael Saville kept very bad company, and that he had no respect for his father.

With none of his family was this young man on good terms. Sometimes he condescended to visit them, but after exchanging a few words with his sister, he would go into the kitchen and eat like a horse, which plainly denoted that his exchequer was exhausted, and that without he feloni-

ously broke through and stole, he would have to fast—that is, if the house in Berkeley Square was closed against him.

In many families may be found good-for-nothings, and yet this is a misnomer. They may be good hands at drinking, at billiard-playing, at pool, at smoking, at riding, shooting, and so on. Michael had a turn for a vagrant life. His father had sent him to a dozen schools, from each of which he had run away after being there a week. He had been preached to times out of mind, but it did him no good. The most solemn discourses had no more effect on him than water when falling upon a duck's back. He was idle, dissolute, at times profane, of no settled opinions—in fact, a thorn in the side of everybody who took him up.

He would say to his father:

‘It’s no use talking to me. I know I’m a bad fellow. You will never make anything of me. If you have a sovereign about you, lend it me.’

He could not work; it was not in him. He was a perfect Bohemian, and he was always in want of money, which, when by some hocus-pocus or other he had acquired, he would spend in the most recklessly-extravagant manner.

No wonder his father shut his doors against him, and acquiesced in the declaration that he was ‘a bad fellow.’

When any one was sufficiently skilful to dispel the gloom which habitually sat upon Felicia’s countenance, his trouble was amply rewarded, for he found her the most bewitchingly entertaining of companions. She was not only clever and pointed in her remarks, but witty and epigrammatic in her replies.

She was most certainly a woman for a man to love, and her reserve, in the opinion of some, heightened the attraction of her natural charms. Men are apt to distrust women who are civil to every one. Perpetual loquacity and a disposition to be at home with everybody is very charming in its way, especially at a country house; but the girls who are so generally agreeable are not the ones who obtain husbands soonest. The quiet, the retired, the occasionally sparkling, those with a hidden store of knowledge, with a mine of intelligence lying beneath the surface, which dazzles and astounds, while it delights and fascinates the man who has been at the pains to work it and obtain these great results; these—the Jane Eyre sort of girls—are those who enthrall men and bind them in chains adamantine.

Felicia was a girl who, in certain tea-and-toast circles, would have been described by the distinguishing letters 'T. P.,' for she was truly pious. She was really and conscientiously good from conviction. Her faith was of that description which can move mountains, but which cannot be moved from its own base.

Her mother was a cold formalist. She did not in any way sympathise with her daughter, who was left very much to herself in the formation of her mind. She liked great people, and was thoroughly delighted with her stay at Hadlow Castle. She loved it for its grandeur, its antiquity, its fame in history, its magnificent furniture, its lovely scenery, its splendid grounds, its thousand-and-one articles of priceless historical worth, its quaint design, its innumerable rooms, its strangely-fashioned corridors and lofty chambers, its fantastic turrets,

its battlements, its rampart, its keep surmounted with a huge flag-staff, from which fluttered the banner of the Linstocks, its park, its deer, its moat, with the grand old-fashioned drawbridge.

What would she not have given to possess such a paradise of a place? Worlds, had they been hers to give.

Mrs. Sandford Saville was always entreating her husband to make money enough to buy an estate like Hadlow Castle. She did not care how he did it. She merely pointed out the end, without taking the trouble to indicate the means. She was his Lady Macbeth.

Mr. Saville was not at heart a bad man, but his wife's influence over him was wonderful. She had been his first love. He had married her in the spring-tide of his youth, when the fervid imagination of an enthusiastic young man raised the object of his adoration to the rank of an idol, and it is no exaggeration to say that he idolised his wife. He always had loved her, even to worship, and now, in the sedateness of middle age, she was still the darling of his early love.

Her faults he freely forgave her, the ill-temper, of which he was frequently the victim, he passed over with a smile, for a tear shed by her still-sparkling eyes made him miserable until the lachrymose demonstration was allayed.

Every wish that it was in his power to gratify he did not fail to humour; and the consequence of this excessive kindness and foolish adoration was that Mr. Sandford Saville, in spite of his handsome income as manager of the Royal Bubble Bank—in spite of the money he made in commerce—in spite of his time bargains—his dealings

in shares and other things—was always in debt, never out of difficulties.

His wife's extravagance knew no bounds. Her milliners' bills were preposterously large, and if she could not eclipse all rivals by the beauty, brilliancy, and 'water' of her diamonds, she was miserable, and, as a natural consequence, so was her husband, until the defect was remedied.

One evening, in the second week in January, Mr. and Mrs. Sandford Saville were walking through the shrubberies in the rear of the castle, preparatory to going home to dress for dinner, when Mr. Saville exclaimed :

'We must think, Honora, of going back to the square. We have stayed here long enough.'

'O, don't talk to me about the square! I hate it after this,' replied Mrs. Saville.

'I own it seems a poor place after Hadlow, but we ought to be thankful. We have not always been so well off, and—'

'That is just like you, Sandford!' exclaimed his wife, whose colour went and came as if she was powerfully agitated. 'Why should you rake up the past, and fill one's mind with bygones, except for the purpose of irritating me? You do it on purpose! I am never safe from your reproaches! You make my life a burden to me!'

'Don't say that,' cried Mr. Saville. 'I cannot allow you to say that, because you know, my dear, that I would not give you pain for anything in this world. I am sure that the past is quite as unpleasant to me as it is to you, and for my part I never care about recalling it.'

'Get me a place like this, Sandford,' exclaimed Mrs. Saville, who seemed to forget her grievance,

and be mollified by her husband's submission. 'Get me a place like this, and I will go to the end of the world for you.'

'But, my dear, it is impossible. You seem to forget that my resources are limited. It is a question of money.'

'How much money?' she asked abstractedly.

'I daresay a quarter of a million,' he replied.

'How many pounds is that? I cannot take the trouble to reckon,' cried Mrs. Saville impatiently.

'Two hundred and fifty thousand.'

'No more? That does not seem much. Get it—make it—get it *somehow*, Sandford, will you? For my sake, exert yourself! I shall never be happy until I have a castle, and a moat, and oaks, and deer, and all that! You always have money. If you want a few thousands you can always get it on a bill.'

'I am perfectly aware of that, my dear,' said Mr. Sandford Saville. 'If I wanted twenty thousand at this moment I could get it. My credit is as sound as a tench. My name is good at Burney's and the Bank of England for more than twenty thousand; but were I to flood the market with my paper I should have to pay for it. Money is dear. The Bank rate is eight per cent at this moment, with a prospect of a rise, and I should have to make desperate efforts to take up my bills when they became due. Paper wings are all very well; but ten to one the man who uses them will come to grief before he has made a very long journey.'

'I wonder, Sandford, that you think it worth your while to trouble me with all those technicali-

ties. I do not understand you, and you only waste time in talking in that "shoppy" manner. Whatever I say carries its meaning with it; and I am surprised that you cannot—'

'What, my dear?' Mr. Saville ventured to say.

'That you cannot get the money you want from *your own bank*,' she said slowly, and with solemn emphasis.

'Do you mean the Royal?' he asked, in a quick husky tone.

'Of course I do,' replied Mrs. Saville. 'Do not all the accounts pass through your hands? Is not everything in your power? Who was that Colonel Somebody that—'

'You must not talk to me in this way, Honora!' exclaimed the bank manager, with a shake of the head and a clouded brow. 'It is my duty to check you. I—I cannot listen to the enunciation of such doctrines; I can't indeed. What has come to you? Your visit to Hadlow must have turned your head. I wish most sincerely that we had never come.'

'That is the way with you,' said Mrs. Saville, in a contemptuous voice. 'Faint-hearted, always faint-hearted! Why are you not sanguine? Why can't you trust some things to chance? You have a brilliant and money-making career before you. A thousand events may take place, and one *must*. I cannot rest until I have a castle like Hadlow,' said Mrs. Saville; adding, 'Besides, Sandford, you forget one thing. *We have a daughter to marry!*'

'Ah, very true; so we have. But it is getting late, my dear; let us go in and dress. His lordship said something about an early dinner.'

CHAPTER II.

A GALLANT RESCUE.

THE only son of Lord and Lady Linstock was named Valentine, but all his friends, by a strange perversion of nomenclature, preferred calling him the Honourable Orson, owing, perhaps, to their retentive memories reminding them of the fairy tale of Valentine and Orson.

The Honourable Valentine Bridgeman, son of Lord Linstock, and heir to his vast estates, was a young man of five-and-twenty, handsome, engaging in his manner, polished in his address, but extravagant to a degree, bearing a mountain of debt upon his shoulders, and going about in fear of his creditors.

He was the best rough-rider in the county. No one could equal him in going across country, and at all steeplechases the knowing ones invariably staked their money upon the success of the Honourable Valentine. His horses were worth fabulous sums; but though he had a fine collection of plates and cups, which he had won, he might have bought them twenty or thirty times over for the money which he had lost.

When Mrs. Saville told her husband that they had a daughter to marry, she intended to convey to her slightly obtuse spouse that she had her eye upon somebody; and that somebody was no other than the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman.

She knew him by report to be a bad man, and most decidedly not a sort of person whom a judicious mother would choose for her daughter's husband.

At the age of eighteen or twenty a man may be sowing his wild oats, and there is a chance of reformation; but at the advanced age of five-and-twenty a man settles down, and accepts his characteristics in a fatalistic manner.

He seems to think that he has been endowed by nature with certain qualities. He may be weak, wicked, extravagant, idle, unambitious, a gambler, as well as a spendthrift, the possessor of more vices than virtues, but though fully conscious of his faults, he ceases to fight against them.

Valentine was at all times fonder of the stable than of the drawing-room, and had he lived in the days of Golden Ball Hughes, when it was the fashion to drive coaches, he would probably have devoted his existence to that inglorious pastime.

This was the man to whom the worldly and cupidinous Mrs. Saville proposed to unite her daughter! Poor Felicia, sensitive, exquisitely nervous, physically and mentally delicate to a degree, susceptible of the least impression, fond, devoted, religious! What a life was before her if wedded to such a man!

Fortunately she was as yet unconscious of her mother's ambitious design, or she would have trembled for her future. Her heart was disengaged, but she had declared most solemnly to herself that she would never marry a man whose only qualifications were a handsome face, a polished and agreeable manner, and a fund of conversational nothings mixed with interesting small-talk.

If her heart could not follow her hand, she was firm in her determination that her hand should never go. Only to think of the bare idea of standing within the altar rails and vowing to love

and obey—in all the simply solemn language of the rubric—a man for whom she had no sort of affection, was excruciating to her. There was something awful to her in the contemplation of it.

Mrs. Saville remarked with pleasure that the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman paid her daughter great attention. Mothers are good judges in such cases, and the one in question mentally came to the conclusion that it would end in a match.

Mr. Bridgeman took Felicia from the drawing-room to the dining-room, and talked to her in the most engaging manner. During dinner a band from a neighbouring town attended to play selections from various operas, which they did in a creditable manner; but this performance slightly interfered with conversation. Whenever there was a break in the music the Hon. Valentine Bridgeman talked to Felicia.

‘I am so grieved to hear that you think of leaving the castle, Miss Saville,’ he exclaimed.

‘Papa has business to attend to, you know,’ she replied.

‘Ah, to be sure! your father is a City man, a rich City man. City men always are rich as Jews—worth hundreds of thousands. No place like the City. I sometimes wish my father had brought me up to trade.’

‘What trade?—that of dealer in horseflesh?’ asked Felicia, who could not resist the temptation of making the remark.

‘You are hard upon me,’ exclaimed Valentine, looking straight at her. ‘It is scarcely fair to attack a man like that. I certainly am fond of horses; they are darling creatures; and if I were

to marry to-morrow, I should certainly divide my love between my horses and my wife.'

'You mention your wife after your horses. That is an insult to the entire sex, and I shall have nothing more to say to you—not a word. Fancy, speaking of ladies and horses in the same breath, as if there were any comparison between them! It's monstrous!'

Lady Linstock rose from the table, and gave a sort of masonic look to the ladies, which caused them to rise also, and they swept from the room.

When the ladies were gone Mortimer Saville left his seat, and took the chair his sister had lately occupied.

'I say, Saville,' exclaimed Valentine Bridgeman, 'is it really true that you go away to-morrow or the next day?'

'My leave's up,' replied Mortimer Saville. 'I shall be hauled over the coals at the Belligerent Office if I don't show up before the twentieth; and, as it is, I have taken all the leave I am entitled to. I shall have to grind all the rest of the year.'

'That's a bore! It is, by Jove! Why don't you go into the City?'

'Because I don't like it. The fact is, Bridgeman, I might go into the City and do well. My father has influence enough to get me five hundred a year. At present I vegetate on a hundred and twenty, and draw on him for what I want besides; but I would rather be an ensign in a marching regiment, or a midshipman with nothing a-year, than a City man. I know it is foolish, but I cannot overcome my prejudices.'

'I have none of that pride about me,' replied

Valentine. 'My only fault is a fondness for horses and a hatred of confinement. I could no more submit to confinement than I could fly. I should go mad if I were boxed up in Pall Mall the best part of a year like you.'

As he spoke he took out his watch, looked at the time, and exclaimed,

'The Bardolph Bridge Volunteers come here to-night. I am captain of No. 4 company. Their head-quarters are at Bardolph Bridge. Some of the fellows hit upon a brilliant idea yesterday. We have kept it a secret from everybody. The frost has lasted so long that the ice bears splendidly, as, of course, you know. Well, Bardolph Bridge is two miles from here. We are three hundred strong, and we make four companies. The fellows go to the stream near the bridge, put on their skates, and go along the ice till they come to the castle. They pile arms under the walls, and have torches given them, which they light, and go round the moat in fours three times; then they fire a volley, and go, with the band playing, to the Esk, spin along to Wiston Reach, and come back to Hadlow to supper, which will be prepared for them in the banqueting-room. What do you think of it?'

'Capital idea,' replied Mortimer. 'The torches will have a very fine effect, and, as the moon is shining so brightly, the volunteers will look uncommonly well. Can all your fellows skate?'

'O yes. We learn to skate down here as soon as we can walk almost. There is nothing like a frost in our country to make us as jolly as sandboys.'

Valentine went away, accompanied by Mortimer Saville, and sought his apartments, where,

with the aid of his servaut, he donned his uniform—a gray, turned up with blue. It was pretty, if not striking.

The frost had lasted for a week with great severity, so that the ice was fully capable of bearing a large body of men. A thaw had commenced on the third day, but the wind chopped round to the east again, and icicles hung from every bough. Spires of frost work, more delicate than the finest crystals, were to be seen on every blade of grass, and every one bowed before the terrible monarch King Frost, who had asserted his sway in so marked and unmistakable a manner.

The prospect of a torchlight journey to Wiston Reach, and a supper afterwards at the castle, was so alluring as to bring out the entire force of the regiment. They wore gaiters, but not their cloaks, as the exercise they were about to take would have been impeded by superabundant clothing.

It was rumoured that there would be a ball after the supper, but that was not geuerally credited, as only some dozen of Valentine Bridgeman's particular friends were invited.

All at once the inspiring air for which the Bardolph Bridge Volunteers were famous burst out upon the night, aided by the united efforts of two capital bands.

The windows of the castle rattled again as the music floated against them on the frosty atmosphere, and a servant entered the room and opened the shutters, so that the assembled company might see what was going on.

The volunteers had piled arms, and were standing in little knots, smoking and chatting merrily

amongst themselves. They were a fine, hale, hearty body of men, inspirited by their two miles' run, and evidently enjoying their novel 'march out' considerably.

'O, this is charming, Lady Linstock!' cried Felicia, whose reserved and passive manner fled as at the touch of a magician's wand. 'How delightful! So kind of you, to think of such a surprise! How can we thank you?'

Every one was equally enchanted.

'It is all Valentine's doing. It is Valentine's surprise, is it not, Mr. Saville?' exclaimed her ladyship. 'The ladies will have it, in spite of my asseverations, that I am the originator of the rendezvous; but you will come to my rescue, will you not?'

'With the greatest pleasure,' replied Mortimer. 'It is Bridgeman's idea entirely, and he has sent word by me to ask if you would like to dress and come to the moat. You will see the men march past, and I really do think it will be a sight well worth seeing. The moon is magnificent, and the ice as firm as a rock.'

Lady Linstock conversed in a low tone with several ladies who were standing round her, and at length the important question was settled.

'O yes!' she replied. 'We should like it above all things. We will run away and put our bonnets on. We must wrap up in plenty of grebe and sable this cold weather.'

When the ladies made their reappearance, they formed quite a brilliant bevy, and the whole party descended the stairs leading to the courtyard of the castle, through which they passed, and going down a flight of steps, found a number of

chairs placed for them at the base of the south tower. The volunteers were extended over a large space of ground. The Colonel had thought it advisable not to crowd too many on one particular spot, so he had distributed them at certain distances.

The foremost batch were within a few yards of the ladies, and close to the bands, which were opposite the south tower.

The Hon. Valentine Bridgeman was in command of the fourth company, which was No. 1 on parade, and consequently marched first. The colonel, an old Indian and Crimean veteran, was talking to him.

The Colonel, accompanied by Valentine, advanced to Lady Linstock, and shook hands with her in the most cordial manner.

‘You have quite stormed our castle, Colonel Forest!’ she exclaimed. ‘You must take care our artillery does not open fire, and send you all to the bottom of the moat.’

‘O, I have no particular fear of that. Your ladyship, have I your permission to give the word for the broken columns to reform? I do not wish to keep you in the cold longer than is absolutely necessary.’

‘When you please, Colonel; we are all “your most obedient” to-night.’

The Colonel saluted and wheeled round on his skates with admirable precision.

The volunteers had all been supplied with lights by the servants of the castle; the word of command was given—they shouldered their rifles, formed fours, lighted their torches, and advanced at the double. The effect was very fine.

The men skated with great rapidity, and passed three times before the party from the castle. As they held the torches they could not 'present arms,' but they gave three cheers for Lord and Lady Linstock—three thundering cheers uttered by stentorian lungs; the noise drowned that of the bands, and the noble lord and his lady were much gratified.

Felicia, with two young ladies of her acquaintance, without saying a single word to any one, ran across the moat when the men came to the 'halt,' intending to stand on the bank or upon the draw-bridge.

Felicia was the leader of this act of secession, and she did not know that close to the edge of the moat the ice had been broken in order that the deer might be enabled to drink.

Hoarse cries of warning saluted her ears from the servitors who were watching the scene from various 'coigns of vantage,' but she mistook their import. She imagined that the volunteers were again advancing on their way to the Esk, and she expedited her speed to get out of the way.

The consequence was that she stepped into an open space, and immediately sank in fifteen feet of water.

Cries of horror rent the air, for the accident was witnessed by all within fifty yards of the spot, but all seemed paralysed with astonishment.

A young man in No. 4 company, under the Honourable Valentine's command, darted forward, leaving the ranks without a word to any of his officers. The flambeau in his hand flared and sputtered as it was carried quickly through the air.

With great cleverness he arrested his precipitate progress at the very edge of the treacherous hole.

The young ladies who had accompanied Felicia were standing in the middle of the moat, rending the air with their screams.

The volunteer sank upon his knees, and as Felicia rose to the surface of the water, gasping and panting as if for dear life, he gently caught her by the shoulder, dragged her with some difficulty from her dangerous position, and laid her on the ice.

This act of gallantry was witnessed by more than a hundred of the company.

A tremendous burst of cheering rang pleasantly in the volunteer's ears as, aided by some gentlemen, he bore Felicia to the bank, and saw her carefully attended to.

Then, with a military salute to the party, amongst whom he alone knew Lord and Lady Linstock by sight, and to whom he was a perfect stranger, he wheeled round, saluted the Hon. Valentine Bridgeman, and took his place as a rear rank man in his company.

'Valentine,' exclaimed Lady Linstock, 'thank that young man, will you? He is very brave, and has saved poor dear Miss Saville's life. Ask him to the ball this evening. Felicia will be glad of having an opportunity of expressing her gratitude in person.'

'I intended to do so,' replied the Hon. Mr. Bridgeman. 'I fully intended doing so.'

'Well done, Fenwick. 'Pon my word, it was splendid. Lady Linstock has asked me to thank you for your bravery. There is to be a hop at

the castle to-night. A carpet dance. Everything very quiet and private. I have asked a few men of "ours." Will you kindly join us? I can set you up in the way of pumps, or anything else you may want.'

'Is the uniform permissible?'

'Of course. O yes, that will do,' replied Bridgeman, who raised his voice, and said: 'Now, you fellows, put those pipes out. We must be moving in the direction of Wiston Reach. 'Tention! By your right—Mar-rch!'

The men were ready in an instant, and had less difficulty in starting than may be imagined.

The monotonous one—two, one—two of the sergeants, who generally mark time for the men in the beginning of a march, was not heard. The band was already in motion, and preceded the column. The men slung their arms, and consequently were able to carry their torches without inconvenience.

The smoke arising from the torches ascended and formed a dense cloud over the long line; but as the men swept past, to the number of three hundred, skating wonderfully well, and keeping abreast and in line with admirable precision, it was an imposing spectacle, and one which intensely gratified all who beheld it.

The party from the castle lingered until the last man was becoming dim, shadowy, and phantom-like in the darkness, and then retired to the drawing-room.

Felicia was not at all hurt. The ducking she got was calculated to give her a severe cold, and she was advised to go to bed. This, however, she strenuously refused to do.

Changing her wet clothes, she descended to the drawing-room, and received the congratulations of her friends.

Her principal reason for coming down again, instead of retiring to rest, was an uncontrollable desire to see the handsome volunteer who had saved her life, if not at the risk of his own, at all events, at some danger to himself.

She thought that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen; and this hastily-formed opinion was confirmed when he entered the ball-room in the society of the Honourable Mr. Bridgeman, who took him to meet Felicia, saying:

‘Permit me, Miss Saville, to introduce full Private Maurice Fenwick to you.’

‘I feel deeply grateful to Mr. Fenwick for his great gallantry. I can never repay the eternal obligation under which he has placed me,’ replied Felicia, in a deep thrilling tone.

Her face was flushed, and she betrayed all the agitation of a school-girl.

‘Pray don’t mention it,’ said Maurice Fenwick; ‘I am only too happy to think that a fortunate chance enabled me to be of service to you.’

The orchestra now commenced a charming waltz.

‘May I have the honour?’ said Fenwick, addressing Felicia, who made a pretence of looking at her card.

She had purposely left the first dance open.

She bowed an assent, and the next minute Maurice Fenwick was whirling her lightly round the room.

Mrs. Sandford Saville was standing by the

side of Lady Linstock as Felicia and her partner swept past.

‘Dear me!’ she exclaimed, ‘who is that young man with whom Felicia is dancing?’

‘I really don’t know; but here is Valentine; he will tell us. Some friend of his, I presume,’ returned Lady Linstock.

‘Who is my daughter’s partner, Mr. Bridgeman? can you kindly tell me?’ said Mrs. Saville.

‘Fenwick—Maurice Fenwick,’ replied the Hon. Mr. Bridgeman.

‘Ah! yes; but what is he?’

‘O! I beg your pardon. As well as I can remember, he is—yes, he is the son of the village apothecary.’

Mrs. Saville looked in an infuriated manner at everybody, and sank into a chair. The idea of her daughter dancing with the son of a village apothecary, when there were three guardsmen, two baronets, and a host of well-bred, well-educated men in the room!

O! it was too monstrous, too preposterous, for any mother’s feelings.

CHAPTER III.

SEEING ‘LIFE.’

IT would be an unjustifiable libel upon the ladies of Bardolph Bridge to say that Maurice Fenwick had never seen a pretty girl during his residence in that locality.

He had seen a great many pretty girls, al-

though he was still heart-whole, but he was of opinion that he had never seen so superlatively charming a being as Felicia Saville, with whom he was enjoying the inestimable privilege of dancing.

Maurice had been favoured with the super-eminent good fortune of saving this beautiful creature's life. Had it not been for his timely exertions in her behalf, she would, in all human probability, have been lying at the bottom of the moat.

He felt that he had some claim upon her consideration, and the reflection pleased him beyond measure.

That he was the son of the village apothecary was perfectly true, but he had been well educated, and was a young man of gentlemanly appearance.

He was well aware of the class distinctions existing in England, and he knew that he was honoured by Felicia's condescension in dancing with him. He hoped most fervently that she was one of those generous, noble-hearted girls who are able to rise superior to such petty, narrow-minded prejudices, for he had learnt to love her.

Yes, short as had been their intercourse and acquaintance, he had lost his heart. Felicia had taken it by storm.

She was complete mistress of the citadel, though she was so unsophisticated as to be ignorant of her conquest.

Maurice could not help thinking that so charming a girl must have many suitors for her hand, some of whom were both rich and noble.

And then a terrible crushing, soul-deadening

feeling of despair took possession of him. He accused himself of madness, of imbecility, of absurd pretentiousness.

Who was he that he should aspire to the hand of Felicia? He did not know who she was, but he could guess that she held a high position in that brilliant society in which he had never moved or dreamt of moving.

Whilst he was overwhelming himself with reproaches the music stopped, and Felicia allowed her hand to glide from his shoulder and settle upon his arm, where it rested with the lightness of a feather.

Fenwick led his partner to a seat, but she refused to sit down, saying,

‘No, thank you. I would much rather walk about. Since my involuntary bath I have been afraid of catching cold.’

‘I hope you will not experience any ill effects from your immersion.’

‘O no, I think not. I am not altogether a hothouse plant. I have experienced some hardships.’

‘Have you, really?’ exclaimed Maurice, who was surprised at such an announcement.

Was it possible that this celestial being, at whose feet he had cast his heart, his hand, and all his future prospects, almost directly he saw her—had she even worked with her hands as his mother and his people were accustomed to work?

Was there a coarse, hard, substantial work-a-day chapter in the unwritten history of her life?

Was she a heroine of romance as well as an angel of light?

He could not bring himself to think so.

Still there were some grounds for the supposition.

Her occasional sighs, her fleeting fits of melancholy, her sad expression when she was not excited, and thought herself unobserved, all tended to confirm even a superficial observer in his opinion that she had her story, and that, like the rest of us, she was not free from that skeleton in the house which is suggestive of many a dark and hidden mystery.

‘I cannot help thinking how deeply indebted I am to you, Mr. Fenwick,’ said Felicia.

‘Pray don’t mention it,’ he replied, stammering, and covered with the blushes that sometimes affect inexperienced and slightly nervous young men. ‘I only—’

‘I will not have you depreciate your services in that modest way. You saved my life. I cannot be sufficiently grateful. Do you live at Bardolph Bridge?’

‘Yes.’

‘Indeed! Are you in the habit of running up to London now and then?’

‘Occasionally; but I am going to London altogether.’

‘To live there?’

‘Yes. Colonel Sir Marchbanks Wrothsby, who is our member—’

‘Does Bardolph Bridge return a member?’

‘It used to return two before the Reform Bill.’

‘It is an important place, then. But I beg your pardon for interrupting you.’

‘Not at all,’ replied Maurice, who was becoming confidential. ‘I was going to say that Colonel Wrothsby has got me an appointment.’

‘Under Government?’

‘Yes.’

‘The fact is, my father, who is a chemist at Bardolph Bridge, voted for the colonel, and he always promised me something. I have been tired of the pestle and mortar for this ever so long, and making pills and weighing out powders is not the sort of occupation I like.’

‘You are ambitious?’

‘Yes, a little! and I was very much pleased to hear yesterday that the colonel has obtained a temporary clerkship for me in the Tax Office.’

‘How very nice!’ said Felicia. ‘I have a brother in the Bellicose Department of the Belligerent Office. He went in, as you are going, as a temporary clerk, but he was soon placed upon the establishment. You must know one another when you come to town. I am sure mamma will be glad to see you.’

With this remark Felicia sat down, and was instantly surrounded by several gentlemen, all anxious to engage her for the next dance, or if not for that, for some succeeding one.

In this crowd Maurice Fenwick was eclipsed, and he stole silently away, casting withering glances at a tall dragoon officer, upon whose arm Felicia was hanging with apparently as much grace and tenderness as she displayed when with him.

‘What does she want to go dancing with that fellow for?’ he said to himself. ‘I’m sure he is ugly enough in all conscience. He would frighten a horse from his oats. I suppose she is disgusted with me because I told her that my father was a chemist. It must have come out sooner or later.’

It really did seem that Felicia had forgotten

all about him, for she was looking up in the tall captain's face, and laughed and chatted gaily.

She thought that Maurice was a handsome man, and wondered how he would look in evening dress. She was not enamoured of his volunteer uniform.

Maurice did not stay long at the castle, but wishing his host and hostess good-night, skated home with three or four friends, who were not desirous of lengthening their days by taking a few hours from the night.

Mrs. Saville took care not to say a word to Felicia about her having danced with Maurice. In the first place she was bound to pay him some attention. Had he not saved her life? That was a fact, and facts are proverbially stubborn things.

Common courtesy, to say nothing of good-breeding, would compel her to accept his invitation to dance.

Secondly, Mrs. Saville was well enough acquainted with the female mind to tell that opposition and persecution generally raises the opposed and persecuted in a woman's eyes.

Persecution creates pity, and pity is allied to love, so she wisely held her tongue.

Thirdly, it was a casual encounter, and Felicia was not likely to see him again. This was her own arguing upon a wrong premise.

Mrs. Saville knew nothing of Maurice Fenwick's appointment in the Tax Office, or of Felicia's invitation to the young man to call at Berkeley Square.

Time flew away. Maurice went to London, passed the competitive examination, in which he

was fortunately called upon to encounter three men of lesser attainments than those possessed by himself. In the intellectual conflict which ensued he was successful, and soon entered upon his duties, which were not laborious.

He received about ninety pounds a year, and that sum paid him well for what he was required to do. Nevertheless, he thought himself hardly used, and grumbled in concert with others, who were always agitating for a maximum amount of pay for a minimum amount of work.

One day he met the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman, who was going to Berkeley Square, and at Maurice's request took him with him. Mrs. Saville received him coldly, Felicia warmly, and Mortimer heartily.

Mortimer was lying on a sofa in the back dining-room, reading a novel, and smoking a meerschaum, the bowl of which was carved in the likeness of Giuseppe Garibaldi.

He had not gone to the office that day, as he had been out all night at a ball, and felt too fatigued to walk to Pall Mall.

As he read his book, and smoked in a listless manner, he sighed when he thought that the day he had taken would come out of his six weeks' leave, and he had taken so many days that his days of liberty were dwindling away like ice before a summer's sun.

Maurice was going away, when Felicia said :

‘You must not go without seeing Mortimer; he is so lazy that I know it is no use sending for him. The mountain, in this case, will not come to Mahomet, so you must not be offended at being asked to go to my brother.’

‘Is he not well?’ asked Maurice.

‘O, yes, he is well enough, but unutterably idle!’

‘We have not much to do in the Tax Office. I generally manage to get away at half-past three.’

‘How delightful! You will find Mortimer—the lazy fellow!—in the back dining-room. Stop a moment. Shall I show you the way?’

‘Thank you, no. I will not trouble you,’ replied self-denying Maurice, who would have given a great deal to have had an opportunity of paying the mistress of his heart a furtive compliment.

His tongue was fettered in the dragon-like presence of her mother, Mrs. Saville being one of those estimable ladies who snap up penniless young men when they are daring and presumptuous enough to take more than a passing fancy to their daughters.

‘Ah, old fellow!’ exclaimed Mortimer, as Maurice entered the room, ‘how are you? Give us your hand. Felicia has often spoken to me about you, and I fully intended to have looked you up at the Tax; but I have been so awfully busy that I could not spare a moment.’

‘I suppose you have to work hard?’ said Maurice Fenwick, sitting down near the sofa, upon which the rather lanky limbs of the Belligerent Office clerk were reposing.

‘Work hard? How do you mean?’

‘Why, at writing sums, and all that.’

‘Not a bit of it, my dear boy. They don’t get much work out of me.’

‘Indeed! I was under the impression that if a man did not work he was dismissed.’

‘O no; quite a mistake,’ replied Mortimer, sending a cloud of anything but fragrant smoke into the atmosphere. ‘A fellow under Government never gets discharged unless he goes through the court or gets his name in the papers. Publicity of that sort is fatal, because it is a scandal to a highly-respectable body of men. The principal business of my life is to prepare the “sweeps” for the different races, and see that fellows pay their subs all right and square. I don’t care about the Belligerent Office.’

‘Don’t you live by it?’ exclaimed Maurice.

‘Live by it!’ exclaimed Mortimer, indulging in a paroxysm of laughter. ‘I say, don’t, please don’t, without you wish to kill me. Fancy any man living on a hundred and ten pounds a year! Why, it wouldn’t keep one in cigars, let alone anything else. The Belligerent is all very well as a place of reference. One’s credit is always good if he hails from Pall Mall. Tradesmen are confiding, and Pall Mall dazzles them.’

‘I suppose you have an allowance from your father?’ said Maurice.

‘Not a halfpenny, my dear fellow—not the value of a penny piece; but he pays my debts every year, which amounts to the same thing. I always tell him he would make a respectable pay-his-way man of me if he would come down liberally with his money. But I don’t know how it is; we do not pull well together. He wants me to come into the City; I can’t bring myself to do it. I always say, “’twould not agree with me;” and then he tells me I may take my chance. Do you mean to say,’ he added, ‘that you live on your eighteen hundred shillings a year?’

‘Yes; I rub along as well as I can. I could spend more if I had it.’

‘I think I could put you in the way of making it; but it all depends upon your own capabilities. Can you play at billiards? Are you lucky at hazards? Do you know how to put your money on a horse?’

‘I am afraid I am deficient in all those qualifications,’ replied Maurice with a smile.

‘Never mind. If you would like to see a little life, call on me this evening about ten, will you? And I’ll take you to the Bar One.’

‘What is that?’

‘Never heard of the Bar One? It is a gambling club, nothing else. You are not obliged to play. Play is perfectly optional. I can introduce you. Would you like to come?’

‘I don’t mind,’ replied Maurice.

‘Very well. I shall expect you at ten.’

Maurice went away, and dined at his lodgings upon a mutton-chop. He was obliged to be strictly economical, to make both ends meet.

His father, the chemist, of Bardolph Bridge, could not afford to give him more than a five-pound note every quarter, so that his income was very limited.

He had some doubts about the wisdom of accepting Mortimer Saville’s invitation; but he was charmed with his free-and-easy manner, and had a great desire to see what is called ‘life’ in all its various phases.

He knew that gambling clubs had been suppressed, and that the police were always on the look-out for those institutions.

He had heard of raids upon play-houses by the

police, and of peers of the realm being taken into custody, with the pertinent query, 'What name to-night, my lord?'

At ten o'clock he appeared in evening dress at Berkeley Square, and found Mortimer Saville waiting for him.

They walked down St. James's Street, and entered Pall Mall, in which thoroughfare of palatial residences the Bar One Club was situated. Externally the Bar One was a quiet and unobtrusive edifice.

There was nothing vulgar or glaring about it. It was not made of blocks of polished marble.

It was founded in the reign of George III., when the Regent and Beau Brummell were on intimate terms; but when the Regent and Beau Brummell quarrelled, that D'Orsay of the past, in order to avenge himself upon his royal but fickle friend, started the Bar One Club, which was open to all the world, bar one; and that one, it is needless to say, was the gay and dissolute Regent, afterwards George IV.

The idea took wonderfully well, and the Bar One Club became famous.

A small supper, in the shape of oysters and chablis, was ordered by Mortimer Saville, who found fault with everything, and stormed at the waiters.

'It is the only way to get attended to,' he said to Maurice. 'If you are nobody, pretend to be somebody. Bluster a little, and all the waiters in the place will break their necks to serve you. When your little breeze is over, patronise them. I am very strict with servants, who, as a rule, detest me. The verdict of the servants' hall is

always unfavourable to me until I open my purse, and then my liberality is praised; but I will be obeyed, and have proper respect paid to my crotchets. I think, of all domestics, housemaids give me the most trouble. A housemaid never will understand that various little articles in use by a bachelor have their own particular and sacred place. No profane hand should touch a razor, yet I am continually finding my razors notched like a saw, simply because the housemaid had no scissors handy.'

At twelve o'clock the young men sallied forth, and made their way to that nocturnal rendezvous which had acquired the significant name of the 'Sons of Darkness.'

Strange as it may seem, the club was fashionable amongst a certain class; rich and dissolute *blasé* young men, and needy men of middle age, antiquated *roués* infected with the traditions of a former generation, silly moths fluttering round the candle which was to consume them, all congregated in the rooms of the Sons of Darkness.

There is a certain district in London which goes by the name of Lower Samaria. In this charitable region was the club situated.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, it may be mentioned that Lower Samaria lies between Portland Place on the one side and the Edgware Road on the other.

It is not a fertile region, far from it. Even noxious weeds refuse to develop in a manner creditable to the locality.

The chief and stable production of Lower Samaria is poor rates. Their amount in the pound is prodigious.

Some of the streets of Lower Samaria enjoy an exclusive privilege. There is no thoroughfare; a curiously-shaped gate and a wooden sentry-box, in which no one ever takes refuge, block up the way. This is a right conceded years ago, when vestries were pliant and patrician interests overwhelming; but old abuses linger, and the voice of the people is of no practical value.

In France people act because they are not allowed to talk; in England they do nothing, because they are permitted the unbridled use of their tongues, and are satisfied with windy speeches.

In one of these old-fashioned streets in Lower Samaria the Sons of Darkness met together to enjoy their unhallowed and illegal sport. The house was a quiet-looking mansion at the corner of an obscure street, of which no one had ever heard, and in which no one worth speaking about lived. The blinds and shutters prevented any lights from being seen in the windows, and the policeman on the beat passed by without seeing the slightest thing or hearing the slightest noise which called for his interference.

It is not pretended to say that the police had not an inkling of what went on at the Sons of Darkness; but in those latter days gentlemen conducted all their arrangements with such consummate skill that if the cleverest retainers of the chief commissioner of police succeeded in forcing their way into the house, they found a body of gentlemen assembled, who were talking, smoking, and playing cards in an inoffensive manner.

The suite of rooms in which the Sons of Darkness met consisted of a supper-room and one for smoking on the ground floor.

Up above were the champagne-rooms, the hazard-room, and the *rouge et noir* and *trente et quarante* department, in which the legitimate business of the evening took place.

Every room was brilliantly lighted with gas, and Mortimer Saville and Maurice found themselves amongst a numerous company.

The wine inspirited Maurice, and he said,

‘I feel in the humour for anything.’

‘Do you? Let us stroll through.’

‘I think I’ll risk a—a sovereign on the red,’ said Maurice.

‘Please yourself,’ replied Mortimer. ‘You will have a chance of seeing the *modus operandi* presently. I like your mettle. You are not such a bad sort as I imagined.’

What was the cause of Mortimer Saville’s excessive civility to Maurice? What could have induced a man of his calibre to take an unfledged rustic in hand?

Mortimer, linking his arm in that of Maurice Fenwick, drew the latter into the seething maelstrom of adventure, and for the first time in his life Maurice was in a gaming-saloon.

CHAPTER IV.

A WORTHY TRIO.

MADAME MILLEFLEURS’ was one of the most noted establishments in a celebrated street. She was a milliner and dressmaker ostensibly, but she had another trade.

She was an enameller. She sold cosmétiques and wonderful powders with extraordinary and unpronounceable names, which were, in reality, nothing more than coloured chalk or a little pearl white.

She did a wonderful trade in gold dust. Ladies would call in their broughams and carriages at Madame Millefleurs' on their way to a party, and run into a little room where several *coiffeurs* were in readiness with little pepper-boxes in their hands, to cast the glittering particles over the heads of those who wished to be considered golden-haired.

One of the cleverest women in her establishment was Patience Pomfret. Very quiet and gentle was she. Subdued and still, even unto melancholy.

Patience was five-and-twenty, very beautiful, and of a sweet disposition. She had no friends in the establishment; she sought nobody's confidence, and she favoured none with hers.

That she had something upon her mind, nobody doubted. Her soul was weighed down, probably by the force of some calamity which had happened to her in the days of her extreme youth. She was eminently trustworthy and reliable. Madame Millefleurs could have trusted her with anything.

Although her salary was small, Patience was tolerably comfortable in her own home. She had inherited a small sum of money at her father's demise, with which she had furnished a little house in Pantile Court.

It contained four bedrooms. Three of these she let out. She could not, however, pay her rent without working.

One evening she came home at ten o'clock. The season was beginning, and extensive orders were given to Madame Millefleurs, who, however great the pressure put upon her might be, never thought of engaging extra hands. Those already retained had to work sometimes eighteen hours out of the twenty-four.

When she reached her house in Pantile Court she opened the door with a key, and descended to the kitchen, where a strikingly beautiful girl awaited her arrival.

She was dressed in a common way, but her face was that of a marble statue carved by a master hand.

The tea-things were ready laid upon the table, and, taking off her bonnet and shawl, Patience told her to pour out a cup of tea.

The girl did so without replying; in fact, that was out of her power, for she was dumb.

Patience had taken a fancy to her some years ago, and befriended the girl when she most wanted a home, for which kindness Mula was most deeply grateful, and did all she could to requite the generosity of her mistress.

After tea Patience took out writing utensils, and with many tears wrote the following letter:

‘I should like to see you, my own—forgive me for using the endearing phrase! but I cannot forget the past; do what I will, strive how I may, it will obtrude itself. I fear that there is danger in the air; you will ask me why—I cannot tell you; my only reason for suspicion is a dream. How silly! how fantastic! you will say; but I frankly admit that I am superstitious. You will

ask me my dream. I cannot tell you in a letter. Come to me, and interpret my midnight vision.'

Taking an envelope from a packet, she directed it to 'Lord Linstock, Hadlow Castle.'

'Here, Mula,' she exclaimed, 'run with this to the post.'

When alone, Patience let her head fall forward upon the table, and exclaimed, in a pitiful tone,

'O my fate, my fate! how hard art thou to bear! Why—why was I born?'

The words found an echo in her soul, but they remained unanswered.

Mr. Michael Saville, the good-for-nothing son of Sandford Saville, the manager of the Bubble Bank, and intimate friend of Lord Linstock, chairman of the same firm and reputable concern, lodged in Pantile Court, at Patience Pomfret's. Her lodgings were cheap, and they were obscure, which suited him admirably.

On the evening on which Miss Patience Pomfret wrote the singular and mysterious epistle to Lord Linstock, Michael Saville came to his lodgings, accompanied by two men.

One was Paternoster Diphthong, who had been an insolvent schoolmaster, and had, since his bankruptcy, given up the 'academy,' and made a little money by betting, by borrowing from his former friends, and by inditing begging-letters.

A meritorious officer of the Mendicity Society, however, had his eye upon him, and Mr. Paternoster Diphthong thought it advisable to stop his letter-writing for a brief space.

The other was Mr. Amen Corner, who had, in his palmy days, been a publisher. His name had

been affixed to some good books, but reckless trading brought him to grief.

When he emerged from his temporary obscurity, he fell in with Diphthong and Saville, and they worked together.

Michael went to his room, which was poorly but comfortably furnished; his friends followed him. A rushlight was burning on the table.

‘Goliah!’ exclaimed Michael.

Taking up the rushlight, he allowed its feeble glimmer to wander about the room.

The uncertain light revealed the form of an ungainly, if not positively hideous, dwarf, who was huddled up in a heap in the corner, and snoring audibly.

Michael Saville exclaimed,

‘Wake up! Goliah, I say, wake up!’

The dwarf, who, by cruel irony, had been called Goliah, sprang to his feet and stared stupidly around him.

‘I didn’t expect yer yet,’ he said.

‘Never mind what you expected,’ replied Michael, disregarding his apologetic tone. ‘Get out the paraffin lamp and light it, and set the bottle on the table. Then go down to Miss Pomfret, and get some hot water.’

Goliah did all that he was told to do without a murmur. He was devotedly attached to Michael, and the latter would have been intensely enraged if any one but himself had spoken roughly to his faithful but grotesque companion.

When everything his master had asked for was on the table, Goliah sat down on the floor, and, leaning his back against the wall, dozed, or pretended to do so.

Paternoster Diphthong made himself a tumbler of whisky-and-water, and having drunk half of it, said, in an oracular and pedantic manner peculiar to him,

‘It is my opinion that a bright future is before us, if we only work things properly. Your idea, Saville, of the City, Suburban, and All England Discount Company does you credit. It is sure to go down with the City men, and equally certain to take with the general public. Now is the time to bring it out. There is plenty of money about to float it, and the shares will go off like steam if we can get a respectable and decent direction. The Bank lowered its rate to-day to three and a half per cent, and money is not only cheap, but abundant.’

‘I agree with you,’ exclaimed Amen Corner, ‘that the scheme is not a bad one.’

‘A good City company is the thing. Look at my father, for instance,’ said Michael.

‘Do you think you can get any one from the Bubble Bank to come on our direction?’ said Paternoster Diphthong.

‘There is Morely. I will try him.’

‘You mean the chief clerk?’

‘Yes.’

‘He has unlimited command over the books.’

‘I believe so.’

‘He could bring some capital into the concern, eh, my lads?’ cried Amen Corner, with a cunning leer.

‘He might,’ said Michael; ‘but it is hopeless to think of doing anything until we get a decent place to hail from. To do that we must have some money. If we can take a furnished house,

and get a few prospectuses of the City and Suburban struck off, we can make a start, and go and canvass for directors.'

'Borrow it,' exclaimed Paternoster Diphthong.

'From whom?'

'Old Ebony.'

'Where is the security?'

'Personal, Corner, and myself real. Your life-policies.'

'Not much use, I am afraid; but it might be tried,' replied Michael reflectively.

Old Ebony was a gentleman of the name of Blackwood, whose trade it was to lend money. Diphthong had had some dealings with him, which were more to the ex-schoolmaster's satisfaction than to Old Ebony's.

Mr. Sandford Saville had insured his son's life for five hundred pounds, and taken care to keep up the regular payment of the premium. Michael had often thought of borrowing money upon the security of this policy; but he had feared that he was too young for the policy to be worth anything.

'Don't you think your respected progenitor might be induced to lend you the requisite amount of cash?' said the schoolmaster, who, from habit, spoke in a stilted manner.

'My father? Not he. He is close-fisted, and would not part with any.'

'That is to be regretted. Do you think if we were to wait upon him in a body—'

'No use at all,' replied Michael; 'you don't know my father.'

'Shall I accompany you to Old Ebony?'

'I think you had better not—he might know you again. I'll go myself.'

The conversation was of a similar nature until the party broke up.

Diphthong and Amen Corner went to a lodging-house, and Michael turned into his miserable apology for a couch, while Goliath had a blanket to cover him.

The next day Michael sought Old Ebony, and bearded the money-lending lion in his den.

There was no brass plate upon the door, but over it was a sort of transparency which informed the passers-by that the house was a loan-office. A shabby-looking bell-handle, which seemed ashamed of itself, was to be seen in the door-post, and under it was written 'Office.'

Michael Saville pulled this bell, and the door revolved upon its hinges. He found himself in a passage.

Another door opened, and he was in the office, which was an apartment well worth seeing.

Mr. Blackwood, *alias* Old Ebony, was in the habit of lending sums of five pounds and upwards, though the resources of the establishment would seldom permit him to go beyond a hundred and fifty.

'Upwards' is vague, and may mean ten, while it may be interpreted to represent ten thousand pounds.

'Come in, my dear sir,' exclaimed Old Ebony. 'Glad to see you. I suppose you have brought that two pun' ten which has been owing so long.'

'Two pounds, Mister—'

'O, it was two pun'; but the interest's been increasing, and now it's two ten, sir. All square, I assure you. Give you one of my prospectuses if you doubt me. It's two pun' ten, sir. I should

have sent, but you left your lodgings in Pimlico, and your father did not know anything about you.'

'I've not come to pay you to-day,' said Michael.

'Not come to pay?' cried Old Ebony, putting his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and blowing himself out like the ambitious and inflated frog in the fable.

'No, I want to borrow some money,' replied Michael boldly.

'Ha, ha! You'll be clever if you get any money while the money market's so tight,' said Old Ebony.

'Tight? I thought it was easy.'

'Eh! they may tell you so, but I know I have to pay for it, and a good figure, too.'

'I must have some.'

'What's your security?'

'My life-policies. I'm insured for five hundred in the "Young and Old," and premium all paid up for three years.'

'Won't do, sir,' exclaimed Ebony.

'Why not?'

'No more good than the lease of a house.'

'Think it over for a moment. I'll pay you well.'

'Can't be done, sir,' said Old Ebony emphatically.

'Well, in that case I'd better go,' said Michael, taking up his hat.

He moved towards the door; but just as he had his hand on the door-handle, Old Ebony exclaimed, in a loud voice,

'Stop!'

Michael turned round, and the two men confronted one another.

CHAPTER V.

AN ATROCIOUS SCHEME.

MICHAEL SAVILLE was completely at a loss to imagine for what reason Old Ebony had called him back. He had steadfastly refused his application for a loan, and he was not a man to change his mind. If he said a thing, the chance was that he meant what he said. His character was decided. He was celebrated for never departing from any position he had taken up. His request to Michael to stop was quite refreshing to that ingenuous young gentleman's drooping hopes; and, turning round sharply on his heel, as if on a pivot, he placed his hat on the table—gloves he had none—and confronted Mr. Blackwood, with hope and distrust strangely mingled together in the expression of his countenance.

Old Ebony returned his gaze unflinchingly. His little gray eyes twinkled, twinkled like the evening stars, and he had a scientific way of putting his pen behind his ear.

At length Old Ebony spoke, saying,

'Well, money's awful scarce just now. The market's tight, sir, tight as a drum. I could make a mint if I only had the money to lay out; but I could manage a little for you if you could get me your father's signature.'

'That's absurd,' cried Michael Saville. 'I tell you so at once. My father put his name to a bill for me! Why, you must be daft to dream of such a thing. Not he! He might do it for my brother, but not for me.'

Old Ebony smiled as if he had a latent idea,

for the broaching of which the time had not yet arrived.

‘If you have a few pounds to spare,’ continued Michael, ‘why not let me have them on my note of hand or my life-policy?’

‘It won’t do, sir. I have lost enough at that game. I might be induced to part with a little if I saw your father’s name, but not without.’

‘I have told you I can’t get it,’ replied Michael sulkily. ‘If that is all you have to say to me, why did you call me back, and make me think you were going to discount my bill? Much better have let me go away.’

‘Well, well, don’t excite yourself,’ said Old Ebony. ‘Look here. I’ve got an idea. If your father won’t give his name, can’t you put it?’

‘Put it! What do you mean?’ cried Michael.

‘Just what I say. You know the governor’s handwriting, don’t you?’

‘O, yes.’

‘Very well, then. Just write his name over a slip of stamped paper, and the thing’s done.’

‘That’s forgery,’ said Michael Saville angrily.

‘Forgery?’ repeated Old Ebony, holding up his hands in wild amazement. ‘How you run on! My dear sir, you don’t know what forgery is. You don’t know the meaning of words.’

‘Perhaps you will be a little lucid, and explain your meaning,’ said Michael. ‘I have too much respect for my liberty and freedom of action to jeopardise it.’

‘Of course,’ returned Old Ebony, ‘of course, and quite right too. Every man ought to keep his eyes open and be on his guard. But this is what I was going to say. You want money—I

don't know how much exactly—possibly fifty pounds, or say a hundred. Young men always want money, more or less. I could manage fifty—not a halfpenny more. Now, I'm only going to throw out a suggestion, which is for your adoption or rejection, as you see fit. Your father is a City man, in a good position—any scandal would injure him. He would not like his name mixed up in a police or a criminal case. Certainly not. Very well. Now, look here, squire. Suppose you were to give me a bill with the gov.'s name to it for a hundred pound, eh?—a hundred pound, and I were to give you fifty pound? D'ye see? Give you fifty. It would be a forgery, and yet it wouldn't. In point of fact and law it would; but it couldn't hurt you, because your father would pay the money rather than see his son shown up in the newspapers. You'd be safe, my dear sir—absolutely safe. Nothing could hurt you. You'd get the money, and the governor would have to pay.'

Michael listened attentively to this atrocious scheme of Old Ebony, and he seemed to become much excited. The perspiration rushed to his forehead, and stood there in little beads. He unbuttoned his coat, and displayed a waistcoat which was not garnished with a watch-chain.

'Ah!' said Old Ebony. 'Watches were made to go, sir.'

'If you mean to say that my watch is gone,' exclaimed Saville, 'you are greatly mistaken. The chain and it have parted company, but the watch is in my pocket. I have frequently not had money enough to pay for my dinner; but I would never part with my watch, for a particular reason—nothing could ever induce me to do so.'

‘Allow me to look at it,’ said the money-lender.

Michael took his watch out of his pocket. It was of English make, and worth a large sum. Perhaps its cost price was thirty or forty guineas.

Old Ebony opened the back case, and started back in surprise as he saw the photographic portrait of a very beautiful lady, young and handsome.

The portrait was secured in its position by a gold rim, and guarded from injury by a thin glass.

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed Old Ebony. ‘You want money, when you have this in your pocket? I am surprised. It is worth a good deal, this. Do you know what it would sell for? Why, I would give you a ten-pound note for it any day.’

‘That watch has its history, Blackwood,’ replied Michael, ‘and I cannot part with it.’

‘You will not sell it to me?’

‘No.’

‘Not for ten—not for fifteen pounds?’

‘Not for a hundred!’ replied Michael, with decision.

‘Come—come! you are holding out because you think I shall give you more; but I’ve bid my highest; take the word of an honest man that I speak the truth. Fifteen pounds for the watch. What! will you not take it? Fill your glass, sir! Fill up—fill up! You are low-spirited to-night, and not warm enough over the matter. Fifteen pounds for the watch. Come! give me the bauble, and— Hey, man, I’ll tell you what. Take the picture out. If it’s the girl’s likeness you want, I’ll have none of it. What is the likeness to me? Take the picture out, but leave me the gold rim.

O, yes! leave me the rim, and I'll say nought about the picture.'

'No, my friend, I cannot part with it,' said Michael Saville. 'I have no doubt that my persistent refusal will raise your curiosity. I have never cared about working, because I believe in my destiny, which I am sanguine enough to believe is a brilliant one.'

'It is a pity,' said Old Ebony, 'but if you are obstinate, it is no use to press you. We will go back to our original business. You want money? Very well; here is a stamp which will carry a hundred pounds; fill it up and affix your father's name to it, and I will hand you over fifty gold sovereigns. There is no danger in the risk; you must be mad to refuse. Your father will never think of prosecuting you. You are as safe as the Bank of England. This is the stamp. I am going into the other part of the house for a few minutes; think it over, think it over while I am gone.'

Old Ebony filled the wine-glass with his own hands, and Michael drank the fiery stimulant without winking. Then laying the stamp, with pen, paper, and ink, before him, he went away, stood still in the passage, and looked through the keyhole of the closed door, watching all the movements of his victim with the eye of a lynx.

Michael wanted the money badly enough, and he had sufficient faith in the ingenuity of his friends, Diphthong and Amen Corner, to believe that something would be done with their new undertaking. Perhaps in three months' time he could take the bill up, and so avert the disgrace that would attend exposure; yet fifty pounds was

an enormous sum to pay for the accommodation, a preposterous and unprecedented sum.

Taking up the pen, he wrote his father's name several times on a slip of paper, and at last upon the bill-stamp, at the same time filling it up. The bill was drawn by him, and purported to be accepted by his father.

'That's a brave boy! That will do famously!' exclaimed a voice at his elbow.

Old Ebony had noiselessly entered the room.

Before Michael could divine his intention, the money-lender snatched up the bill, glanced hastily over it, folded it up, and put it in his waistcoat-pocket.

'Gi—give me the bill!' faltered Michael, who wished that he had not been rash enough to sign it.

'Give you the money, you mean, my fine fellow! What's the use of the bill to you? None at all. I may make some use of it, perhaps, at the end of the three months during which it has to run.'

'But I didn't intend—'

'That's nonsense, my dear sir. If you didn't intend, why did you do it? You cannot plead that the bill was tainted with fraud in its inception.'

He opened his desk, and paid him the fifty pounds.

'Good-day, Blackwood,' he said; 'you shall see me shortly. In the mean time, don't negotiate the bill. I might want to take it up.'

Old Ebony smiled grimly, as if the idea of Michael Saville possessing a hundred pounds at any time was something exquisitely ludicrous, and to be believed only on the ground of its impossibility.

‘Take care of yourself, my young friend,’ he replied. ‘Make yourself easy about your little bit of caligraphy. Go straight home, and don’t get robbed.’

‘Not I. I’m too wide awake for robbery. The London thieves may be clever, but they don’t come the old soldier over me.’

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE GAMING-SALOON.

WHEN anything unpleasant obtrudes itself upon us, we endeavour to shut the door of our memories, and drive it away from the mnemonic stronghold it seems inclined to take possession of.

A remarkably unpleasant fact forced its way into Michael Saville’s mind as he left the scrivener’s house with the ill-gotten gold chinking in his pocket.

He could not disguise from himself that he was a forger. Certainly, not as yet in the strong grasp of the law’s iron hand, but with the sword of Damocles hanging over his devoted head.

Old Ebony had him completely and thoroughly in his power. There was no positive danger to be apprehended, unless Mr. Sandford Saville refused to acknowledge and honour his son’s acceptance. If he did this—if he strenuously denied that he had given the bill or authorised Michael to make use of his name—then nothing but the money-lender’s forbearance could save him from a convict prison.

As he walked moodily along the street, Michael Saville had only one consolation, and that was the possession of the fifty pounds which he had just obtained. The sound of sovereigns knocking one against another always inspirited Michael. When his exchequer was empty he was a wretched and miserable being, but when in funds he was totally metamorphosed.

His first impulse was to go straight back to his confederates, and organise a plan of the campaign they were about to commence; but his evil genius triumphed, he wavered, halted by the way, and turned into a tavern, where he was known, and where he met some companions who had often treated him generously when he was in want of money. They soon found out that he had an adventitious accession of wealth, and he lent a sovereign to one and thirty shillings to another until nearly ten pounds had disappeared.

It occurred to him that he might supply the deficiency at some play-house; the Sons of Darkness was well known to him, and he resolved upon going there. He experienced some little difficulty in tearing himself away from his friends, who took a great fancy to him all at once, and begged him to stay with them; but their entreaties were unavailing.

A hansom cab took him to Lower Samaria, and he had an opportunity (not for the first time in his life) of observing midnight life in London.

The evening which Michael Saville had selected for his visit to the Sons of Darkness was the one on which his brother Mortimer had, in obedience to his mother's request, taken Maurice Fenwick to that den of high play.

Michael did not stay long in the refreshment-room. He drank a glass of sparkling Moselle, which a beplushed and obsequious waiter handed him, and passed into the gaming-saloon.

Mortimer Saville's tall figure caught his eye in a moment, and he noticed that he was watching the play of a young fellow who was sitting at the table surrounded by a knot of lookers-on.

Pressing through the crowd, he perceived the young man, who in fact was Maurice Fenwick, was playing at a game resembling the well-known *rouge et noir*. The table was covered with black and red baize, but in one corner was marked a Prince of Wales' feathers.

According to the rules of the game, the man who placed his money on this plume was entitled to ten times his stake.

Maurice had carefully watched the game, and found that the revolving needle, which decided the chances of the game, had not stopped once at the feathers during thirty revolutions.

Now was his time, and he did not neglect the opportunity. He had a little money with him, amounting in all to about fifteen pounds.

He began by staking a sovereign—that he lost; then he staked two sovereigns, and having lost that, went on doubling his stake until he had eight sovereigns on the feathers.

This time, as luck had it, he won, and received from the man with the rake, who is known as the *croupier*, the sum of eighty pounds.

If he had been a prudent man he would have gone home with that sum in his pocket; but the spirit of gaming is soon imbibed, and as the acquisition of the money was unexpected, and he

did not absolutely require it, he thought that he would risk it and see if he could not win some more. If he lost, he would only be in the position in which he was when he began. He had heard of a lucky vein, and was sanguine enough to hope that he would be able to make his fortune by a lucky hit.

He did not begin to stake immediately. He watched the game as before, and contented himself with calculating the chances.

When Michael Saville made his appearance, Maurice was in the act of venturing a second time. He tempted the fickle goddess with a sovereign, as he had done before, and continued doubling his stake every time.

He had lost until he had thirty-two pounds on the feathers. This was his last effort; if he lost that he would be unable to venture again.

There was a breathless silence.

Not a word was spoken. It was, comparatively speaking, an insignificant sum to lose, but there was a great deal to be won, and some excitement was manifested about the result.

If Maurice won he would be the happy possessor of three hundred and twenty pounds, which, as he only received about a hundred a year, would be equivalent to three years' salary in the Tax Office.

The index revolved with its accustomed regularity, and, much to the *croupier's* disgust, stopped at the feathers.

Maurice Fenwick had won his money.

Crumpling the notes in a hand which trembled with excitement and delight, Maurice placed the notes and gold in his pocket, and, pushing back

his chair, made room for any one else who was disposed to tempt fortune.

Mortimer seized him by the hand, and said, 'Bravo, old fellow! Well played, upon my word. I did not give you credit for such pluck. Of course, you will try again?'

'No, I think not,' replied Maurice hesitatingly.

'Not try again! O, that's all bosh! You are in a lucky vein to-night; you will make your fortune. Your luck is tremendous. You'll break the bank, which will smash up under ten thousand. Go on again, my boy, and make yourself independent for life. The Tax Office may be all very well. It is a gentlemanly occupation, and all that; but if you had five hundred a year of your own, I don't suppose the Tax would see much of you.'

'No, I don't think it would,' replied Maurice Fenwick; 'but, you know, I have now three hundred and twenty pounds, and it is a great deal of money to me. I should like to keep it. I could do so much with it. My sister wants a dressing-case; I could buy her one and send it to her as a birthday present; and, in addition to that, I should like to give Miss Saville something as a token of my esteem. This money is a small fortune to me, and I would rather not risk the chance of losing it.'

'If you are like that, keep it,' said Mortimer. 'Of course, there is no particular code of honour which makes it incumbent upon you to give the bank its revenge, but—perhaps I am a little peculiar—I should do it.'

'Would you?'

'Of course. I don't say at this moment; wait a bit, and see how things are going.'

‘How do?’ exclaimed Michael to his brother.

Mortimer gave him a nod, and Fenwick said,

‘Who is that?’

‘A fellow I know.’

Michael overheard the answer, and exclaimed,

‘I am his brother, but as he is a Government clerk, and I am an independent gentleman, he has the good sense to see the difference between our mutual positions, and—’

Having delivered himself of this speech, he sat down, and began staking upon the red. Luck was against him, and he lost every halfpenny he had, except a little loose silver he had in his waistcoat-pocket.

This loss made him desperate, and he approached Mortimer and said,

‘Look here; I have lost all my money. Lend me a few pounds to win it back again.’

The hoarse cry of the *croupier*, ‘Make your game, gentlemen! make your game!’ rang through the room, and Michael continued:

‘Make haste! I am sure to win. I have backed the red ten times in succession unsuccessfully, but now there must be a change. Give me five pounds. You shall have it again.’

‘Not a rap!’ replied Mortimer, turning on his heel.

‘I can let you have ten or fifteen pounds!’ exclaimed Maurice, who felt sorry for the loss Michael had sustained.

Besides, Michael was Felicia Saville’s brother, and sometimes sisters are very much attached to scampish brothers. In lending some money to Michael, he might be improving his position in Felicia’s estimation.

He handed him four five-pound notes, which Michael took with nervous eagerness, saying,

‘I don’t know who you are, but I will make this up to you some day. I am not really a bad fellow, although my family make a point of running me down. Give me your card, and rely on my gratitude.’

Michael went to the table, and began to stake his money.

Suddenly there was a cry of alarm in one corner of the room, and a hoarse whisper ran from one to the other that the police were coming.

The gaming-tables, with everything appertaining to the business, were speedily removed and put out of sight, and those who were in the room stared blankly at one another, wondering what the result of the incursion of the police would be.

Mortimer Saville was talking to young Lord Cardminster, who was at one-and-twenty a captain in the Guards, and a most accomplished *roué*.

‘This is uncomfortable,’ exclaimed Mortimer.

‘Why the deuce couldn’t the fellows come some other time?’ said Lord Cardminster.

‘They came, I suppose, because they knew they were not wanted. Shall we all be locked up?’

‘No, my dear fellow,’ replied his lordship, in a phlegmatic manner. ‘It is only a question of money. Every man about town knows how that can be arranged.’

In the mean time the hubbub in the room increased, and the footsteps of the intruders were heard on the stairs.

CHAPTER VII.

SICK UNTO DEATH.

PATIENCE anxiously awaited a reply to her letter ; but day after day passed, and she received none. The mysterious events which made up her history of the past preyed upon her mind, and weighed her down to the ground.

At no time had her constitution been a strong one, and of late it had been enfeebled by long hours, hard work, and sad recollections.

One evening she came back to the Pantiles with a flushed face and an aching head. Her cheeks were so red that they might have been anointed by some of Madame Millefleurs' unguents.

She couldn't touch a morsel of the meagre supper which she had provided for herself.

With a sigh she threw herself upon her bed, drew the old patchwork quilt close around her, and endeavoured to find oblivion in the embrace of a heavy slumber.

The next day she was worse, a malignant fever had seized upon her already enfeebled limbs, and the chances were that she would never rise again from her bed of sickness.

The poor are always very good to one another. There is more real charity existing in the hearts of the poor than can be found amongst the rich. And why ? The rich are selfish : they think themselves safe by reason of wealth from the attacks and stings of poverty ; but the poor know that they are perpetually liable to cold and hunger, and they cannot expect to be ministered unto if

they neglect others who may stand in need of their assistance. The New Testament is essentially the gospel of the poor.

Had it not been for the kindheartedness of a neighbour occupying a second floor in the Pantiles, Patience Pomfret might have passed away from earth to heaven without a kind word or a silent prayer.

Mrs. Martin had seen nothing of Patience for a whole day; and fancying that something had gone wrong, sought her in her house, and found her in a state of great debility.

Her first care was to fetch a doctor, who pronounced Patience in great danger. The disease itself from which she was suffering was not in itself sufficiently malignant to bring about a disastrous issue, but when it acted upon a weakened frame and a shattered constitution it became formidable.

On the evening of the third day, when the twilight was gradually giving place to the murky clouds of night, Patience threw her bloodless but fevered hand towards Mrs. Martin, and touched her upon the arm.

‘What is it, my dear?’ exclaimed Mrs. Martin. ‘Do you find yourself a wee bit better? Will you take a little of the cooling medicine the doctor left you?’

‘I am dying,’ replied Patience, ‘but I shall not die yet. They say people who are in my position have the gift of prophecy. I say that I shall not die until I have seen some one. I *must* see him—my spirit would not rest in the grave unless I see him!’

As she spoke, a gentleman wrapped in a great-

coat which completely enveloped his form, wearing his hat slouched over his eyes as if to prevent any one having a good look at his features, stopped at the public-house at the corner of the court, and addressing a tall thin man who was standing near the door after the manner of loafers, said :

‘Can you tell me if this is a place called the Pantiles?’

‘Yes, sir. Who do you want?’ replied the man.

‘Never mind who I want,’ retorted the other testily. ‘Is this the place?’

‘It is, sir.’

‘Thank you. There is sixpence—go and get a glass of ale.’

The man took the money, and put it in his pocket ; but instead of going to the tavern to get a glass of ale, he followed the gentleman, saying to himself :

‘He is about some little game that may be worth something to me. It’s private, or he wouldn’t try and keep it dark. I’ll follow him.’

The gentleman was Lord Linstock.

The fellow tracking him was Luke Fentyman.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

LORD LINSTOCK walked quietly over the flagstones of the Pantiles, as if fearful that the echo of his footsteps would reveal his rank to the miserable denizens of the poverty-stricken court, within the precincts of which he had ventured.

The nobleman was quite unconscious that he was followed by Luke Fentyman. So far did such a possibility seem from his thoughts, that he never took the trouble to turn his head and look over his shoulder.

He went direct to Patience Pomfret's house, so that it was fair to presume that he had been there before. He knocked at the door, which was opened by Mula, the dumb girl.

'How is your mistress?' he inquired, in a low tone.

Mula made some rapid passes with her hands, which appeared to be intelligible to Lord Linstock, who continued :

'Conduct me to her.'

Mula did so, and omitted to close the door after her, intending to do so on her way to the kitchen. Luke Fentyman took advantage of this remissness, and stole on tiptoe into the house, having the hardihood to follow Lord Linstock up the stairs, which were only faintly lighted by a rush which Mula carried in her hand.

Patience was sinking fast, but hearing footsteps, she turned on her curtainless bed, and peered anxiously into the semi-darkness. His lordship had come in time ; just before the last spark of the flickering lamp had expired, and the once elastic mind extinguished for ever.

Mula walked into the room and deposited her miserable apology for a candle upon a deal table, which was destitute of any covering. At a sign from Lord Linstock, she quitted the apartment as noiselessly as she had entered it, and passed Luke Fentyman on the stairs without being aware of his dangerous proximity, which was so far fortun-

ate for her, as the fellow held his clenched fist ready to knock her to the bottom of the flight if she attempted to give the least alarm of his presence. With her tongue she could do nothing, but with her hands much.

Finding that he was not noticed, he stole silently up-stairs, and placed his ear to the key-hole of the door of the room in which Patience Pomfret was lying in death's grasp.

He could hear nearly every word that was spoken. Lord Linstock's bass voice, which when lowered was deep and sonorous, was distinctly audible; but occasionally Patience was so weak and so much overcome by the inroads of her malady that her tones were too faint to penetrate to the passage.

Lord Linstock took a seat by the bed-side of the dying woman, whose face became irradiated with a flush of pleasure. She was apparently grateful for the kindness and condescension of her visitor.

'You are ill,' he said, advancing a proposition which was too palpable for contradiction.

'I am sick unto death,' was the reply; 'but I can die without regret since I see you before my decease. O Ernest, I have suffered much for your sake. Never once has my love wandered from you. I have endured penury and privation, hard work, and banishment from all my friends and relations in order that you might not experience inconvenience or annoyance. My fate has been wretched. My life has been one long pain. I have endeavoured to do my duty, and I cannot accuse myself of the commission of one intentional fault of a grave nature.'

‘You will have your reward in another world,’ said Lord Linstock, whose eyes were dimmed with tears. ‘You deserve to dwell among the angels. I beg that you will forgive me for my part in your unhappiness. We have both been the victims of bad judgment and unforeseen circumstances.’

‘I forgive you willingly on my death-bed, as I have forgiven you all along,’ replied Patience.

‘Is any one acquainted with your history?’

‘No living soul but—’

‘But whom?’ interrupted Lord Linstock hurriedly.

‘Mula!’

‘The dumb girl?’

‘Yes.’

‘I ask you because if everything were known to a vindictive or mercenary stranger, the consequences to me would be very serious.’

This remark was overheard by Luke Fentyman, and that worthy treasured it up in his breast.

‘Should I, who have always been so jealous of your honour and your reputation, who have gloried in the name of Linstock, have been so imprudent as to confide my secret to any one but the humble and devoted attendant who has been the only companion of my solitary hours?’

Patience uttered this speech in a tone of reproach, as if she felt hurt at the bare suspicion of having been unfaithful in any way to the man with whom she was mysteriously connected.

‘If it is possible, you will some day let my father know everything, will you not? Do not rush into danger by so doing. I would not have

that for worlds,' she added. 'But it would give me great pleasure to think that my family would be some day enlightened as to the mystery of what they now look upon as my early death. Would that I had died seven years ago; but I am thankful that I can say, God's will be done! It was hard for you to stifle your love for me, was it not?'

'It was, indeed!'

She seized his hand in her almost pulseless grasp, and pressed it tenderly. Then a sudden fit of coughing attacked her. When this was over, she was very weak, and scarcely able to articulate. Looking up in Lord Linstock's face, she said:

'See to Mula, le—lest tem—temptation—'

She was unable to say more. She fell back and groaned heavily.

'Gracious heavens! she is dead!' said Lord Linstock. 'Poor thing! Death is a happy release for her. Rest her soul in peace! I have much to answer for, but I cannot accuse myself of intentional sin.'

However callous a man's nature may be, there is always something awful about death; and when Lord Linstock felt certified of the fact of Patience Pomfret's decease, he shuddered involuntarily.

Strong man as he was, he sank upon his knees, thinking that no eye save that of heaven was gazing on his humility, and breathed a fervent prayer, the burden of which was that the woman who had died might be worthy of divine clemency.

Rising from his knees, he sought the bell, but found that the chamber was destitute of that useful appendage.

He walked to the door, opened it suddenly,

and saw Luke Fentyman on the landing, rapidly retreating.

‘Ho!’ he said, ‘who are you? Hi! I say.’

The man did not wait to be questioned. He had learnt that a secret was to be mastered, and that a dumb girl called Mula was the possessor of it. He resolved that he would work upon the girl’s fears or upon some of her passions until he ascertained the meaning and nature of the connection which existed between the gentleman whom he had followed and Patience Pomfret.

As no attention was paid to his summons, Lord Linstock descended the stairs and sought Mula. When the girl saw his lordship enter the kitchen in which she was seated, she rose from her chair and immediately placed pen, ink, and paper upon the table.

Seizing the pen in a nervous grasp, Lord Linstock wrote: ‘Your mistress is dead. I will provide for you. Say not a syllable to any one of what she may have told you, or of what your intelligence may have put you in possession.’

Mula read the paper and nodded her head.

‘Swear,’ said his lordship.

Mula took the pen and wrote, ‘I swear.’

‘That will do,’ cried Lord Linstock. Laying a purse upon the table, he added, ‘That will defray your present expenses and those of the funeral. Let the body be buried this day week at Kensal Green. I will meet you there at two o’clock.’

Mula wrote: ‘It shall be done. I fully understand; I shall expect you at the cemetery.’

Taking up the paper in his hand, Lord Linstock crushed it, but instead of throwing it into

the grate, kept it in his hand, thinking he would throw it away in the street, where, if any one did pick it up, they would find it altogether unintelligible. He wished Mula good-night, and took his departure. When he entered the Pantiles, he looked about for a dark corner, and threw the paper into it.

But he did not perceive a dark figure which darted forward and picked up the paper with nervous eagerness.

Unwittingly he had given Luke Fentyman the clue to the burial-place, and informed him that he himself intended to be present.

CHAPTER IX.

PROVOCATION AND RETALIATION.

THE proprietors of the club known as the Sons of Darkness were so skilful in their movements and so well versed in their business, that they experienced little or no difficulty in hiding away every trace of gambling long before the police could make an entry into the room.

The inspector and his men took a survey of the room, drank a few glasses of wine with the manager; and it was singular that the inspector, whom no one would have suspected of venality, went away with a handful of sovereigns chinking together in his pocket, and his ears tingled pleasantly as the sound of the melodious music fell upon them.

Mortimer Saville did his best to persuade

Maurice Fenwick to play again ; but, in spite of his utmost exertions, the young man could not be induced to tempt Fortune a second time.

‘No, no, my dear fellow,’ he said. ‘Don’t ask me. I don’t look upon the bank as I do upon an individual. I am not bound by the rules of honour to give it revenge. I have made a little money, which will be of great service to me, and I mean to keep it. If you are my friend, you will at once see the force and truth of what I say.’

‘Please yourself,’ replied Mortimer Saville, with a shrug of the shoulders, and lighting another cigar as he spoke. ‘If I had been you I should have gone on. You are in a lucky vein, and safe to break the bank. I frankly confess that I have no sympathy with you faint-hearted players.’

‘Your disposition is unlike mine, for I am cautious to a degree.’

‘An admirable trait, no doubt,’ said Mortimer, with a sneer. ‘But come. If you will not risk any more of your “hard-earned gold,” we had better be on the wing. It is getting into the small hours, and we shall not be fit for work to-morrow.’

‘With the greatest pleasure in the world,’ answered Maurice, taking his friend’s arm.

On the staircase they were passed by Michael Saville. He did not notice his brother, but Maurice Fenwick exclaimed, ‘How did you get on?’

Michael looked up, exhibiting a countenance flushed with wine and convulsed with disappointment.

‘Lost every rap!’ he said. ‘Haven’t a penny piece.’

‘Take this,’ said Maurice, trying furtively to slip a note into his hand.

Mortimer’s quick eye caught the movement, and interpreted it at a glance.

‘Don’t be absurdly ridiculous,’ he said.

‘What do you mean?’

‘He will never repay you.’

‘I don’t care about that. I can’t bear to see fellows so miserably hard pressed.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Michael Saville proudly. ‘I am under an obligation to you already, but that is no reason why you should insult me.’

‘Insult you!’

‘Yes. I don’t live upon promiscuous charity.’

‘Bravo!’ muttered his brother in an undertone. ‘I didn’t know you had so much independence in you.’

‘If you will call upon me,’ said Maurice Fenwick, much hurt, ‘I will endeavour to prove to you that I had not the slightest intention of insulting you.’

‘Call upon you!’ repeated Michael Saville, as if he were not in the habit of receiving invitations from respectable people.

‘Yes.’

‘Where?’

‘At the Tax Office.’

‘O, all right! I’ll call, but—’

‘What?’

‘You didn’t tell me your name.’

‘Maurice Fenwick.’

‘Fenwick?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’ll give you a friendly hail,’ said Michael, waving his hand and passing on.

‘You are very young,’ said Mortimer Saville, casting a commiserating glance upon Maurice.

‘Why?’

‘You know so little of the world. His refusal to accept the tissue you offered him was only a trick. He is the most worthless fellow in London. We have all tried to do something for him, but he is irreclaimable.’

‘He is your brother,’ replied Maurice, in a tone of mild rebuke.

‘I know that, my good fellow,’ said Mortimer. ‘But that has nothing to do with it. If your brother is a good-for-nothing fellow, there is no necessity, in my opinion, to fraternise with him and take him by the hand. If you associate with men of his stamp, you will soon find that your decent friends will give you the go-by in the street.’

‘Yourself amongst the number?’ queried Maurice.

‘Precisely. Myself amongst the number.’

‘You may give me the cold shoulder now if you like. I shall not allow any one to dictate to me in my choice of acquaintances.’

‘O!’ cried Mortimer Saville, standing still in the street, and regarding his companion curiously. ‘Your sudden accession of wealth has made you rather more independent than usual, hasn’t it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean by that,’ replied Maurice, blushing.

‘Shall I explain?’

‘If you please.’

‘Now that you have a pound or two in your pocket, you can afford to give yourself airs which you never dreamt of when you were weighing out

pill-dust and apportioning *aqua pura* in the paternal shop!

Maurice's face burned.

'If my father is a shopkeeper,' he retorted, 'I consider myself fully as good as you are.'

'Do you? It is fortunate that you have a good opinion of yourself.'

'Why?'

'Because, in all probability, you are the only one who has,' returned Mortimer, with a laugh.

'Do you want me to knock you down?' cried Maurice, in an ungovernable rage.

'You can try, if you like. I used to have a good idea of handling my fists; but possibly I have forgotten something lately.'

Maurice, maddened by passion and inflamed by drink, hardly knowing what he did, rushed at his companion; but Mortimer stepped back adroitly, so that the blow fell short; then, throwing out his left hand, he struck the foolish young man in the face, and sent him rolling into the gutter.

A policeman happened to come by at this instant, and wished to be enlightened as to the nature of the disturbance.

'The fellow's tipsy, policeman,' cried Mortimer. 'I know him slightly, but I haven't the remotest idea where he lives.'

'Shall I lodge him for nothing, sir?' said the policeman, with a grin.

'By all means. Be careful with him, as he has a large sum of money about him.'

Mortimer knew that the policeman would ransack his pockets, and perhaps appropriate some portion of the money which was to be found in them.

‘Good-night,’ he said. ‘Look after your charge.’

And away he walked.

‘He’s a nice sort of pal to have, I don’t think,’ muttered the policeman. ‘Howsomever, if the gent’s got a little loose cash, we’ll go halves. O my!’ he added; ‘he’s as rich as a Jew!’

With an amount of celerity which must have been the result of practice, a large amount of notes and money was transferred to the policeman’s boots. He would not take the whole of the money—that would have looked too suspicious; he left a considerable sum.

‘That’s treating him handsomely. Now we’ll move him on.’

Maurice was just beginning to recover from the effects of the knock-down blow Mortimer Saville had administered to him; but his ideas about things in general were so confused that he suffered himself to be dragged along by the guardian of the peace without offering a word of remonstrance.

The station-house was not far off, and a dismal-looking place it was, with a flaming gas-jet in a broken lamp over the door. Inside was a drowsy inspector, who took up his pen as he saw a prisoner come in.

‘What is it?’ he asked, in a monotonous voice.

‘Gentleman tipsy, sir.’

‘What’s that?’ cried Maurice, beginning to recover himself.

‘The constable accuses you of being tipsy—and disorderly, did you say?’

‘No, sir. Very quiet—in the gutter.’

‘O! You are accused of being tipsy in the gutter. What have you to say in answer to the charge?’

‘It is an infamous falsehood.’

‘You deny being in the gutter?’

‘I don’t say that.’

‘H’m! In my opinion you are not sober at present; so I shall lock you up to keep you out of further mischief, and let the magistrate decide upon your case in the morning. What name?’

‘I will give you no name, and I protest—’

‘Gentleman found tipsy by police-constable—name and address refused,’ said the inspector, writing in the charge-sheet.

Maurice’s expostulations went for nothing. His pockets were turned out, and his property deposited with the inspector, and he was rudely pushed into a cell, where he remained till morning; being brought out at ten o’clock, with a bump on his forehead, a dirty face, a short stubbly beard, an unclean collar, and looking altogether disreputable. He was taken in a cab to the police court, where the sitting magistrate fined him five shillings for being tipsy.

He was especially annoyed at this adventure, because it prevented him from continuing Mortimer Saville’s acquaintance, and he thought this would be an insuperable bar to his intercourse with Felicia; but he was greatly mistaken. Two days afterwards, Mortimer called upon him at the Tax Office, and laughed off the affair, saying:

‘You were very screwed, indeed, you know; and so pugnacious, that I thought I couldn’t do better than give you in charge. You wouldn’t get into a cab, and you were very outrageous.’

Maurice had his doubts about the truth of this statement, but it did not answer his purpose to contradict it; and he accepted an invitation to dine at the Bar One Club on the following Tuesday.

Maurice could not blame Mortimer for striking him. He only did it in self-defence, and that was just what every man of spirit would have done. He had provoked it, and as he wished above all things to keep on friendly terms with the Savilles, he put his pride in his pocket. Such is the influence of lovely women over Government clerks, as well as ordinary mortals.

Mortimer had not been gone half an hour, when Michael Saville made his appearance outside the inelegant building in which the business of the Tax Office was conducted. He passed through an iron gate, walked through a sort of courtyard, pushed open a hybrid door of wood and glass, well polished at the top by contact with many hands, and tolerably disfigured at the bottom by the unprovoked assaults of many boots, and found himself in a spacious hall. The flagstones had been whitened to a painful pitch of intensity by the industrious hands of persevering housemaids.

In the hall was a sort of sentry-box, with a glass top, in which a messenger sat.

To him Michael said :

‘Mr. Fenwick. I want to see Mr. —’

‘Fenwick, sir? Yes, sir,’ said the portly messenger, who was exercising the privilege of an Englishman. ‘Accountant-General’s Office.’

‘Pray where is that?’

‘Go up the stairs, and turn to the right. Go ’long passage, and turn to right again; then ’scend

stairs two flights, and go 'long passage, 'scend stairs, and go 'long passage; then ask m'senger.'

'O!' said Michael, rather confused, 'much obliged to you.'

Portly messenger bowed, and went on exercising Englishman's privilege, whilst Michael Saville ascended the stairs.

'That's a lively sort of fellow to help a lame dog over a stile,' he said. 'I wonder if I shall ever find the Accountant-General's Office? Let's see, what did he say—up the stairs, and turn to the right? I'll be hanged if I can remember.'

CHAPTER X.

A FRIEND AT COURT.

THE passages in the Tax Office were something awful to contemplate. There was no end of them, and no end to them. They dovetailed into one another with a marvellous, not to say mysterious, precision, and so neatly druggeted were they, that the traveller might have fancied himself in the midst of the Sahara, for his footfalls were noiseless.

Now and then Michael met silent figures gliding along like shadowy ghosts, but he forbore to ask his way, until, utterly disheartened, he sat down on a door-step, and awaited the advent of somebody to enlighten his darkness.

At length some one approached him. He rose and said: 'Will you kindly tell me the way to the Accountant-General's department?'

‘Go straight on,’ replied the young man to whom he had addressed himself. ‘It is somewhere up that way.’

‘What is this?’

‘This? O! The Commissariat.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Michael, who might have added, ‘for nothing.’

‘I shall never get to the place where that man Fenwick is,’ he said to himself. ‘It is no good going back, because I don’t know my way. I didn’t take any landmarks. This is certainly a most discouraging place. It is the first time I ever called upon a man in the Tax Office, and I solemnly swear it shall be the last. I had better push on. I must come to an end somewhere or some time or other.’

So he pushed on, and met a gray-headed man, who unfortunately was deaf.

‘Do you know where the Accountant-General’s is?’ said Michael.

‘Eh? Speak up, my good sir.’

Michael repeated his inquiry in a loud voice.

The gray-headed man shook his head.

Michael shouted.

‘Sorry I can’t oblige you,’ said the gray-headed man, ‘your voice is so low.’

Michael gnashed his teeth and walked along, wishing the Tax Office was at the bottom of the Thames.

Presently Michael met somebody else, who, in reply to his question, said:

‘Straight on, and turn to your left.’

This was something definite achieved, which was a great consolation. Going straight on, and turning to the left, Michael came suddenly upon

a chair, in which was seated a messenger reading a newspaper, which one of his patrons had generously given him.

'This is the Accountant-General's Office,' he said. 'Whom do you want?'

'Mr. Fenwick.'

'No. 7.'

'Where?'

'Opposite.'

'Will you call him out?'

'It ain't part of my duty, but—'

'O, never mind,' cried Michael, advancing to No. 7, and pushing the green baize door open.

He found himself in a large room, in which were twelve or thirteen men, all busily engaged in writing, copying, or cataloguing accounts. He had little difficulty in singling out Maurice Fenwick, to whom he advanced.

The eyes of the other men were raised inquiringly for a moment, and then lowered, but one or two of the idle and inquisitive leant their heads upon their hands and their elbows on the desks, while they gnawed their pens and cast restless glances upon the intrusive stranger.

Fenwick got up, and said,

'Ah! how do you do?'

'Do you happen to be disengaged?'

'For half an hour? Yes.'

Maurice went to his chief and spoke half a dozen words, and then led the way out of the room. He was followed by Michael. When they were outside upon the landing Maurice said,

'I am glad you found me out. I wanted to see you. You must not be offended at my offering you money the other night.'

‘Don’t mention it,’ replied Michael. ‘My family hate me, and you were with Mortimer; therefore I resented what I thought an impertinence dictated by him.’

‘Your sister—’ Maurice ventured to remark.

‘I must make some little exception in favour of my sister. I believe she loves me. They say sisters always love scampish brothers. She gives me money when she can, and sends me letters full of good advice, hoping that I shall settle down some day, but I never shall. If a miracle were to happen I might, but I have Bohemian blood in me.’

‘I think Miss Saville is a most charming girl.’

‘You know her?’

‘O, yes; not intimately, but sufficiently to be very much pleased with her.’

‘She is a little too conscientious, if anything,’ said Michael, ‘but she is a dear, good girl. My people want her to marry that Hadlow Castle fellow—what’s his name?’

‘Do you mean Valentine Bridgeman?’

‘That’s the man. Well, they want her to marry him, but I’ll lay something she doesn’t. I don’t think she’ll ever marry. Felicia’s one of those girls who go into convents.’

Maurice Fenwick registered a vow that Miss Saville should not go into a convent if he could help it.

‘I hope,’ said Maurice, ‘that if I refer to the subject of money I shall not be offending you.’

‘Me! not at all, my boy. I don’t mind borrowing your money now I know you. I have put all my friends under contribution, and so many have cut me in consequence that I can’t be very particular.’

‘Will ten or twenty—’

‘Better make it twenty; lump that with the other ten, and I’ll give you an I O U for thirty.’

‘O, no,’ said Maurice; ‘acknowledgments of that sort are totally unnecessary. If you say you will pay me when you have an opportunity, or when it is convenient, I shall be perfectly satisfied. I could not think of taking your signature to a bit of paper.’

Michael stared at him as if he were receiving different treatment from that to which he was generally accustomed, and replied, ‘Very well, my dear fellow, if you like to be so doosed good-natured, Michael Saville’s the last man to disappoint you. If Fortune smiles upon me as she ought to do, I’ll pay you with compound interest.’

‘Hang the interest!’

‘What do you want, then?’

‘I’m not a money-lender, and don’t care about interest.’

‘In what way can I serve you?’

‘There is a way.’

‘Put a name to it.’

‘Strictly between ourselves!’

‘Yes.’

‘Your sister is—that is to say, you might—’
Maurice stammered, and broke off.

‘Might what?’

‘Why, say a good word for me. I don’t know how to put it, but Miss Saville is very lovely, and—’

Michael Saville leant back against the banisters, and laughed a loud hoarse sort of laugh, which startled the slumbering messenger from his propriety.

‘So you are smitten with my sister, and you lend me some money on the principle of love me love my dog. Well, I’ll do what I can for you, Fenwick; but you must keep your eyes open, or the Hon. Valentine will be one too many for you, and carry her off to Hadlow.’

‘Do you really think so?’

‘It won’t be my mother’s fault if he doesn’t, and she is as clever as she is determined.’

‘You surprise me.’

‘Why should it? We are nobodies. If my father is making some money, and connected with the banking interest, it wasn’t always so. People who are nobodies always want to make themselves somebodies, more especially if they hail from the City. We are no exceptions to the rule, and the Hon. Valentine would be an acquisition to the family; don’t you see that?’

When Michael received the money he wished Maurice good-bye, and went away, to return to his associates, Amen Corner and Mr. Diphthong. Before he went he once more assured the young Tax Office clerk that he would do all he could for him with his sister, and chuckled to himself as he thought that he had found a banker to supply his wants whenever an emergency occurred.

Time fled by, and Felicia learnt to regard Maurice Fenwick with affection. She was perfectly well aware that he admired her, because he sent her innumerable presents of jewelry and flowers, all of which she duly sent back again, because her mamma told her that it was improper for her to receive them.

She did not love Maurice at first, but one day she happened to overhear a conversation between

her mother and Mortimer. The former was upbraiding the latter for not having removed Maurice from London.

‘Why trouble yourself with him at all?’ said Mortimer. ‘I believe myself that Fenwick is harmless enough.’

As the name of Fenwick fell upon her ears Felicia, who was in the conservatory, attending to some calceolarias, at once became interested. She wondered what could make her mother anxious for the ruin of the young man whose only fault had been rescuing her from the ice on the moat at Hadlow Castle. If that was a crime, by all means let his sin be visited upon him ; but in her eyes it was no crime. It was an act of heroism. She thought that she was justified in overhearing her mother’s remarks, and she continued snipping the dead leaves from the plants, and exposing the buds, as if she was utterly unconscious of her mother’s presence.

‘I am positive,’ said Mrs. Saville, ‘that Mr. Fenwick loves Felicia.’

‘I am perfectly aware of that,’ replied Mortimer.

‘Well, are you not afraid?’

‘What do you want me to do?’ asked Mortimer, driven to bay.

‘I want you to get rid of this fellow Fenwick.’

‘How?’

‘O! I don’t know—anyhow you like. Send him back to weigh medicines in his father’s shop.’

‘It is all very well to say do this, and do that,’ grumbled Mortimer. ‘I have made one or two attacks upon my bird, but I find him shy, though

he is a young man from the country ; all I can promise is that I will do my best.'

'Very well, I rely on you,' replied Mrs. Saville,

Mortimer went away to walk to his office, and Mrs. Saville entered the greenhouse in an inadvertent manner, hardly knowing whither her wandering footsteps were conducting her.

The first object she saw was Felicia, who stood scissors in hand, with flushed cheeks and heaving bosom.

'You here, Felicia?' she cried, in a voice of astonishment.

'Yes, mamma.'

'How long have you been here?'

'Long enough to overhear your conversation with Mortimer.'

'In-deed!' said proud Mrs. Saville, gathering up the skirts of her dress.

'Why should Mr. Fenwick have incurred your resentment? Just because he loves me! I have never in any way encouraged him. You cannot accuse me of unmaidenly or unladylike conduct. I have never been anything but commonly civil to the man. I had not the least inkling that he was attached to me until I heard you say so to Mortimer just now. Why cannot you be candid with me, mamma?'

'My dear child,' replied Mrs. Saville, with one of those oily smiles which were peculiarly her own, 'you must know that I have your welfare at heart'—here she laid her hand upon her daughter's shoulder. 'You are my only girl, and it's a mother's pride to see her children well married; but if it is a pride to marry a boy well, it is doubly and trebly a pride and a triumph to marry a

daughter to a man of rank and position. You understand that ?

‘O, yes!’ murmured Felicia.

‘Has Mr. Fenwick either the one or the other ? He is, to begin with, the son of a shopkeeper ; he is a Government clerk, without a penny either present or prospective ; he is, strictly speaking, neither a gentleman by birth, education, nor position.’

‘But, mamma dear, I don’t care about him,’ interposed Felicia. ‘Maurice Fenwick is nothing to me !’

‘I know that perfectly well,’ replied her mother, with a smile. ‘I give you credit, dear child, for better sense and more perception than perhaps your father does. I wish to guard you against a possible peril. The man saved your life, after a fashion, if you remember, when you fell into the water at Hadlow, and he has a plausible way with him which might impose upon some shallow girls.’

‘Possibly.’

‘I love you, my child,’ continued Mrs. Saville, into whose eyes the tears forced themselves or were forced. ‘I love you ; and if you were to throw yourself away upon a worthless man, my heart would be broken for ever. You know all the antecedents of our family ?’

‘I wish I were ignorant of them.’

‘That is a vain wish,’ returned Mrs. Saville, a little severely ; ‘you know everything, and you must be fully aware of the necessity existing for our doing something to consolidate the family and fix it on a firm basis. To do this I look to you. Mortimer is lazy and indifferent ; yet he has a

chance. Michael is worthless, and will never do anything but disgrace us. Who have I to fall back upon but you?’

‘I have never intentionally given you a moment’s uneasiness, mamma.’

‘No, my dear, I fully admit that; but you must forgive me for being jealous of you, and putting myself upon my guard.’

When Felicia was alone, she could not help thinking of Maurice Fenwick, who was to be attacked and ruined simply because he loved her.

She began to pity him, and everybody knows that pity is akin to love. If she had never heard her mother’s injudicious remarks, the chances are she would never have taken any interest in Maurice.

She hoped that he would defy her brother’s efforts to ruin him as he had hitherto done; and she thought that she should only be doing her duty if she wrote an anonymous letter, warning him of the peril in which he stood. The idea was slightly chivalric, and perhaps a little rash, but young ladies never stop to consider such trifles, and sitting down at a table, she opened a writing-case, and wrote in a feigned hand:

‘A friend advises Mr. Maurice Fenwick to be on his guard against a particular friend of his, the first letter of whose name is S. Mr. Fenwick’s ruin is intended by this false friend, and it is the earnest hope of the writer that his sinister designs may be frustrated.’

Having folded this note up and directed it, she sealed the envelope, and was preparing to put it in her pocket, when a voice at her elbow exclaimed:

‘Feely!’

She looked up and saw her brother Michael.

‘Who are you writing to?’ he asked.

‘O, a friend. No one you know.’

‘Shall I post it for you?’

‘Can I trust you?’

‘With anything,’ returned Michael.

Felicia thought a moment, and then gave him the letter. He glanced at the superscription, and said:

‘Fenwick! Is that Fenwick in the Tax Office?’

‘Yes.’

‘He is a friend of my own, and I came here to-day to mention his name to you.’

‘Really!’

‘He is in love with you, Feely, and he asked me to tell you all about him, and see if I could not make some impression upon you. He is really a good fellow, and—’

‘Yes, yes, I know all that. If you are acquainted with Mr. Fenwick, you can post the note and hold your tongue. If I ever hear a word about the matter that you have given wings to, I will never speak to you again. The note is simply to warn Mr. Fenwick against Mortimer—and now you know all about it.’

Michael pleaded his friend’s case to the best of his ability, as he had promised, but Felicia said nothing in reply with the exception of a few commonplace remarks, which were of no value whatever for repetition.

In spite of her seeming indifference, Felicia Saville was beginning to love Maurice Fenwick. If her mother had not interested herself so much

about the young man, and if no disturbance had been made about him, the new feeling would never have been born. The germ had been sown, and it not only grew, but flourished, until her thoughts were exclusively occupied with the tall figure of the handsome volunteer who had saved her life at Hadlow Castle.

CHAPTER XI.

FEMININE CONFIDENCES.

FELICIA SAVILLE'S great friend of all great friends was Miss Fanny Freemantle. This young lady had been educated partly in England and partly in France. In the latter country she had passed a few years in a convent school in the Faubourg St. Honoré. The conductors of the establishment declared that they never tampered with the religion of the girls who were placed there, but if they did not do so, Miss Freemantle returned to England with the most decided High Church proclivities.

Berkeley Square, as all the residents in that charming and agreeable locality know, affords very nice pasture—not for cattle, but for croquet. The lawn is well rolled and evenly kept. The trees and the shrubs keep out the impertinent gaze of the vulgar, and nothing can be more delightful than to play at that feminine game in the very heart of London, and yet feel yourself a hundred miles in the country.

Some friends of the Savilles living next door

improvised a croquet party, and it was agreed that every one might invite a friend. Felicia at once wrote to Miss Freemantle, saying:

‘Dearest Fanny,—If you are happily disengaged, may we hope for the pleasure of your society this afternoon in the Square? We are going to have a croquet tournament. Do come, there’s a dear good girl, and oblige your own

‘FELICIA SAVILLE.’

Miss Freemantle had dressed herself to go into the Park for a drive when she received this note, but she simply changed her mind and her boots, putting on the smallest pair she had in the world, so that the perfect symmetry of her matchless foot might be seen to advantage at croquet.

At first she went to Berkeley Square, and had a quiet little lunch with Mrs. Saville and her daughter. Just such a lunch as a lady may eat without scandal, or being accused of having a preposterously large appetite.

The croquet assembly was to meet at three o’clock, and there was plenty of time after lunch for Felicia and her friend to have a cosy chat in the conservatory. O, those cosy chats, what have they not to answer for!

The Saville conservatory was a charming little nest, full of camellias, geraniums, calceolarias, and early roses, in addition to those thousand and one plants without the presence of which no greenhouse is considered perfect.

The young ladies ensconced themselves upon a stool near a very bushy and tall camellia, and Fanny Freemantle, taking Felicia’s hand, said:

‘Dear Felicia, it seems an age since we met. Do tell me all about your dear self. Positively I am dying to know everything that you have seen and done during the last fortnight. Is it not more since we had an opportunity of talking quietly together? It must be more.’

Felicia sighed, and looked more sentimental than usual, replying:

‘I only tell you as the greatest secret in the world, but you are my friend, dear Fanny, and I know perfectly well that I could trust you with my life. The fact is simply this—like yourself, I have found an admirer.’

‘Is he handsome?’

‘Very. At least, I think so; but you will, I hope, have an opportunity of judging for yourself.’

‘Do you really love this man? What is his name? Tell me his name. I think there is a great deal in names. I can almost tell a man’s character and disposition from his name.’

‘He is called Maurice,’ replied Felicia; ‘Maurice Fenwick.’

‘A pretty name. Mrs. Maurice Fenwick would look well on a card. Have you practised the signature—Felicia Fenwick? There again you are lucky, because you have the benefit of alliteration’s artful aid. What a pity he is not a gentleman!’

‘O, I do not for a moment say that,’ cried Felicia. ‘I think him quite as gentlemanly as any man I ever met in my life, but the misery of the whole thing is, his father is a chemist—they call him an apothecary—down at Bardolph Bridge, where he comes from.’

‘Now listen to me, dear child,’ said Fanny Freemantle, with a patronising air. ‘I have had

much more experience than yourself, and I should say that you would be acting in the most foolish manner if you were to throw yourself away on this young fellow in the Tax Office. He has, by your own confession, nothing but his miserable pay to live upon, and your people are not likely to help you, without I am greatly mistaken. What do they say about it? do your father and mother favour the match?

‘They do not. Candidly I own that they are very much opposed to the bare idea of it, and mamma has gone great lengths in her hatred and detestation of Maurice. I believe, from all I have heard, they wish me to marry Lord Linstock’s son.’

‘Valentine Bridgeman?’

‘Yes.’

‘O, he is a charming fellow, quite a lady’s man, and one of the most delightful companions. Does he affect you at all?’

‘O yes, he has a way of being very civil to me at all times, and I fancy that his people would like to see him married to me, because they think I have great expectations from papa, and that it would be a good thing for the family; but though I do not positively dislike Valentine, Fanny, I could never love him. I should like to look upon him as a brother, but nothing more.’

‘Come, young ladies, we are all going to the Square!’ exclaimed Mrs. Saville’s voice at the entrance to the conservatory.

‘Will *he* be there, darling?’ whispered Miss Freemantle.

‘Maurice?’

‘Yes.’

‘I do hope so; and yet it is not likely, without

Mortimer brings him, and I think he dislikes him too much,' replied Felicia.

'When is your first ball this year?' inquired Fanny Freemantle, flying off at a tangent, as is the custom of young ladies, whose impulsive nature makes them wander from subject to subject, culling a flower here and a flower there, like little busy bees.

'In three weeks. The cards go out to-morrow. Of course you will come? It is to be quite a grand affair. There will be a strange mingling of the *sangre azul* and the City dignitaries. It will be most amusing.'

'What shall you wear?'

This pertinent question afforded room for speculation and conversation until the Square was reached. The lawn was smoothly rolled. Gunter, the confectioner, had sent a man over with iced drinks, and various other things in the way of refreshments, which might prove acceptable to the players. The croquet balls and mallets were produced, and the game began.

At half-past four, Mortimer and some friends made their appearance.

'O, look!' cried Miss Freemantle to Felicia, 'there is your brother! and I declare, Pooshay is with him—how singular! Then there is the eternal and everlasting Peevles behind. But who in the name of goodness is that with Peevles?'

'That,' replied Felicia, with a deep burning blush, 'is Mr. Fenwick.'

'O!' exclaimed Fanny Freemantle, fixing her curious regards upon the young man, and looking at him with an intensity which led her to the verge of rudeness.

There was something so gentle and so winning, and yet so dignified about Maurice, on that spring afternoon, that Fanny Freemantle, woman of the world as she was, could not help confessing to herself that he was very captivating. 'He is quite charming,' she said inwardly. 'I declare he is an Adonis. He is everything she described him. I quite envy her her choice. She is right to prefer him to every one else, though he be as poor as Job.'

Did those disjointed sentences indicate a new phase of feeling in Miss Freemantle? did they foreshadow an active rivalry? Was the first glance she cast upon Maurice Fenwick the germ of a colossal tree, which every subsequent glance watered and fructified?

The sequel will show.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROBBERY AT THE BANK.

THE clock had just struck ten when Mr. Saville entered his wife's boudoir with his hat and coat on. They had dined quietly that evening. The party consisted of husband and wife and the two children, Mortimer and Felicia; therefore it will be seen that the party was purely and simply a family one. After dinner, Mortimer went out to what he called a 'hop,' Felicia went to the drawing-room to write some letters and make up her diary for the last three days, and Mr. Sandford Saville remained in the armchair near the

fire. The dessert was upon the table, but he did not touch it; occasionally he drank a glass of strong full-flavoured port wine. He was alone. His wife, he knew, was awaiting him in her boudoir, for she had said to him as she swept from the room, with a loud rustling of her voluminous skirts:

‘I shall expect you, Sandford, when you are ready!’

‘Ready for what?’

Something of a novel or a dangerous nature, we should think, if Mr. Sandford Saville’s agitation goes for anything.

Heavy drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and he clenched and unclenched his hands in an uneasy and restless manner. Occasionally a strong spasm convulsed his frame, and he uttered inarticulate exclamations.

At last he roused himself by the exercise of a prodigious effort, and rising, sought his wife, reeling up the stairs like a drunken man.

The excruciating agony that that man must have undergone during that one brief hour after dinner is indescribable in all its horrid intensity.

‘Well, Sandford,’ exclaimed his wife, ‘I suppose you have made up your mind at last, or you would not have put your hat and coat on. O, how I wish I were a man; you should see no vacillation about me. I would conceive a design, and execute it too, all in the same breath. Men are cowards at heart. Women have ten times their courage.’

‘I have resolved to do it; but I do not know that I am wise in having come to such a resolution.’

‘Why not? How you speak! how hollow your voice is, Sandford! And look at the lines of your face drawn down! How changed you are! I declare you look ten years older! You do indeed!’

‘If I do, you are the cause of the sudden change!’

‘I! Of course you will overwhelm me with reproaches. I must expect that. But do not stand here and waste time in talking. Away to the City and do your work; be calm and collected, and do it well. Everything depends upon your serenity. For Heaven’s sake, do not botch and bungle the affair; rather than you should do that, I would have you abandon the affair altogether.’

‘If anything untoward should happen,’ said Mr. Saville, ‘do not blame me—accuse yourself alone.’

‘You are half-hearted, Sandford. You have been so all your life. You were so in Australia, when—but it is of no use to rake up bygones of an unpleasant nature, which are better buried. Pull yourself together, and go. I shall expect you before twelve.’

Mr. Saville gave his wife a hasty nod, and left the room, which was soon afterwards entered by Felicia, who said:

‘O, here you are, mamma! I have been looking all over the house for you. Where’s papa? Has he gone out?’

‘Out! What made you think that? He is not well, and has gone to lie down.’

‘Really, I think he must work too hard in the City. City work is very trying, mamma, and

must tell upon a man in time. What do you think?’

‘Perhaps. Your father is not a strong man,’ replied Mrs. Saville reflectively.

She afterwards took up a book, in which she pretended to be immersed, as if she wished to deprecate further conversation.

Mr. Saville pulled his hat over his brows when he entered the street, hailed a cab, which drove him to Cornhill, and alighting, went on foot to Old Broad Street, in which were the offices of the Royal Bubble Bank.

The private entrance to the bank was up a narrow alley. With this locality Mr. Saville was well acquainted, for he darted up the alley like a dark shadow, noiselessly placed a key in the door, as noiselessly turned it, and admitted himself.

No sooner had he entered than a little dog ran up to him, smelled at his legs, and caressed him as if he were an old friend.

Mr. Saville returned his caress, and gave him a large piece of meat, with which he had provided himself before leaving home.

This dog was a small Skye-terrier, and a capital house-dog. He was one of the defensive pillars of the bank, and great reliance was placed upon him.

Mr. Saville went on tip-toe to a small room, which was at the back of the counting office and the pay-cash counter of the bank. In this room the bullion was kept, in two large safes embedded in the wall. At the corner of each of these safes a large mastiff was chained, but directly Mr. Saville approached the door, he spoke to them through the keyhole, and called them by their names, which prevented them making an outcry.

These dogs he fed with biscuits, and produced a dark lantern, with the aid of which he was able to see what he was about.

The safes he unlocked with patent keys, and appropriated a large amount in gold and notes. He then took a chisel from his pocket, and made it his business to disfigure the locks of the safes as much as he could.

The operation was rather arduous, and took him a full hour to accomplish. At the end of that time he had rendered them utterly useless, and given them the appearance of having been broken open from the outside, which was the object he desired.

Whilst he was thus engaged, an old woman who had charge of the premises was entertaining an old friend in the kitchen, which was not on the basement, as is usual, but on the attic floor.

This old woman was called Mrs. Posh, and her friend was known as Mrs. Wall. Mrs. Posh was honesty itself. She was the widow of a non-commissioned officer, who had been killed in the Crimea. Great confidence was reposed in her, and she had excellent characters from several people who had employed her. The kitchen was also Mrs. Posh's bedroom; it was a *multum in parvo*. On the present occasion, a bottle of gin stood on the table, and a kettle was hissing and singing its merry song upon the hob. It was evident that the two old dames intended to enjoy themselves.

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Wall, 'how lonesome it do seem, to be sure! However you can stand it, my dear, I can't make out. It's awful lonesome, and that's the truth.'

‘It’s use and habit that makes me able to go through with it. I’m an old woman,’ replied Mrs. Posh, ‘and when we get on in years, you know, we don’t care much where we live, as long as we’ve got a roof to cover us which isn’t the work-house.’

‘That’s right enough ; but I say—’ cried Mrs. Wall.

‘What?’ said Mrs. Posh, jumping from her chair. ‘Don’t ’ee say it’s a blackbeetle, nor yet a cockroach. Don’t ’ee, don’t ’ee. I can’t abear ’em ! they do set up my back awful.’

‘It isn’t cockroaches nor yet blackbeetles,’ replied Mrs. Wall scornfully. ‘It’s thieves !’

‘It’s thieves ? No, it can’t be. O Lor’ ! Where’s the sal volatyle ? But it can’t be.’

‘And why not ?’

‘Because of the dogs.’

‘Well, I ’eard a noise.’

‘Perhaps you did ; it might be ghostes ; but it ain’t thieves,’ replied Mrs. Posh emphatically.

Both old women rose to their feet, and putting their hands to their ears, listened intently.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INNOCENT VICTIM.

AFTER listening for about ten minutes, Mrs. Posh sank into a chair and heaved a deep sigh, and said,

‘I don’t hear nothing now. Deary me, Mrs. Wall, if you only knew the ghosty sort of life I

lead in this place, you'd shed a tear and pity me. I'm not of the grumbling sort, as you know. I take things easy, although there's a deal to try one's temper in this world.'

'And that there is,' exclaimed Mrs. Wall sympathisingly.

'It's a wonder how people lives,' continued Mrs. Posh, 'for things as they go on now are enough to drive one crazy. There's vitriol and sugar in the gin, there's pea-dust in the snuff, and chicory in the coffee. Well, my dear, let's make ourselves comfortable afore you feel called upon to go. I don't suppose there's any one down-stairs, because the dogs are bound to bark; so we'll put it down to my fancy, if you please, and don't make no objection.'

'Let it be so, mum,' replied Mrs. Wall. 'I'm your guest, and ready and willin' to do your bidding.'

The two old women composed themselves, and the foul work down-stairs went on uninterrupted. When Mr. Sandford Saville had arranged everything so as to denote and lead people to believe that a burglary from without had been committed, he paused, and, sitting down upon a chair, rested awhile from his labours, so that he might compose and quiet himself. His nerves were in a frightful state of jar and tension. He felt all to pieces, as it were, and the perspiration, wrung from him more by the agony of his thoughts than by the severity of the work he had done, ran from his face in a stream.

The man was not a criminal of his own accord. He was not naturally evil and bad at heart. He was simply weak. His nature was not sufficiently

powerful to resist the continual assaults of his wife, who was perpetually urging him to enrich her by any means, no matter how dishonest or how perilous.

Unhappily for himself, he had, in a moment of semi-imbecility, given way to her promptings, and consented to rob the bank of which he was the trusted manager.

But one thing remained to be done before Mr. Sandford Saville took his departure, with at least fifty thousand pounds in his pocket. Most of the money he had appropriated was in notes, a consignment of which had late that afternoon arrived at the bank, and which had not been entered in the books by his own express order, consequently the numbers were not known, and he would have little or no difficulty in passing them and turning the paper into ready money.

The one thing remaining to be accomplished was the slaughter of the dogs. This was easily effected, for he had provided himself with some poisoned meat. It is difficult to say why Mr. Sandford Saville had not disposed of the dumb animals long ago. Perhaps his soft weak heart had a corner in which lurked a little pity.

He was fond of dogs, and two of those he was about to kill were magnificent creatures, and worth a large sum of money. But it was necessary that he should be their executioner, and he did not shrink from the inevitable task which devolved upon him.

He could not have recourse to half-and-half measures. They would destroy him; and, after all, what was the death of a couple of dogs?—nothing—a mere bagatelle, which he could afford

to laugh at when he compared it with what he was doing. Robbing the widow and orphan, the hard-worker and the daily toiler, who had been laying up something for his old age, was the crime of which Sandford Saville was guilty, and he knew it.

He had the stolen money safely secured about him, and he knew that he must not let his coward heart fail him.

First of all, he threw a piece of arsenicated meat to each of the mastiffs.

When the noble beasts had rolled on to their sides in the agonies of a painful and excruciating death, he turned his attention to the terrier which had met him on his entrance to the house, and he treated the poor creature as he had treated the mastiffs. In a quarter of an hour all three dogs were dead, and he felt himself at liberty to depart.

He buttoned up his coat and arranged his attire, and stole softly over the boards till he came to the door, which he opened carefully, letting himself out with the utmost caution.

The court was, as he had expected to find it, deserted. The sound of a policeman's footstep could be heard in Old Broad Street, but it was far distant, and appeared to be going in the direction of Bishopsgate Street, so that he rightly concluded he had no danger to apprehend from him.

He would not trust himself inside a cab; he was afraid of that mode of locomotion, because it was easy to trace a cab to any particular house. So he walked with a restless eagerness that showed how perturbed his mind was. When he reached Berkeley Square it was close upon midnight, and, letting himself in with a key, he went straight to

his wife's boudoir, and found Mrs. Saville awaiting him.

'Your presence here,' she said, 'admonishes me that you have been successful so far. How much have you carried off?'

In reply, he unpadded himself, as it were, emptying his pockets and throwing the contents upon the table. Mrs. Saville regarded the crisp notes with the affection of a miser who loved them for their own sake, though in reality she only cared about money as a means to an end, regarding it as the wherewithal to purchase property, and looking upon golden sovereigns as stepping-stones to greatness.

Then she made him sit by her side, and bade him give her a history of the night's work, of which she did not permit him leaving out the minutest circumstance. When her curiosity was satisfied, she complimented him, and spoke brave words to reassure him, and help the poor trembling fellow to keep up his spirits.

Mr. Saville tried to look happy, but he failed lamentably. His wife had provided a supper for him, but he was totally unable to touch so much as an oyster; he drank copiously, however, and shortly afterwards retired to rest—to rest, but not to sleep.

He would—wretched man—have given worlds for the power of closing his eyelids in a sweet refreshing slumber, but it was not till near morning, when the gray dawn was streaming through the shutter chinks, that exhausted nature asserted its prerogative, and he fell into an uneasy sleep, from which he was perpetually starting, and crying out in a terrified manner.

At about half-past ten on that eventful night an important part in this history was being enacted by the proprietor of a small semi-detached villa at Highgate.

In Hawk House lived Mr. Francis Barclay, who was a clerk in the Royal Bubble Bank. He was a young man, and married. He had two children, and he found it necessary to work very hard in order to make both ends meet. However, being a man of industrious habits, he contrived to do so.

His salary in the bank was a hundred and fifty pounds per annum, but, being a clever shorthand writer, he augmented his slender income.

Every one engaged in the City dines, and an hour is usually allowed for that salutary process.

If an imperial edict were passed, forbidding Englishmen to dine, there would infallibly be a revolution.

Mr. Francis Barclay was, however, an exception to this very general rule; he did not dine in the middle of the day, he only lunched, contenting himself with a tea *à la fourchette* when he returned to the bosom of his family in the evening.

He was, nevertheless, absent from the bank during the full hour allowed for abdominal recreation. What did he do during the interval? He made money.

He reported the proceedings of certain companies; the meetings of companies generally taking place at one o'clock, so that every one may have an opportunity of attending.

There is generally one public meeting at least in the City every day, and the newspapers with which Mr. Barclay was connected paid him a

small sum for duly and correctly reporting the proceedings.

It was his custom to take his notes home with him, and translate them into decent and intelligible English after his tea-dinner. He was an admirer of economy, and liked tea-dinners because the cheering and not inebriating beverage satisfied his thirst and saved the expense of beer.

On the day of the robbery at the bank he had attended a midday meeting, and afterwards, in the evening, a public dinner at the Albion Tavern in Aldersgate Street, the speeches at which were not brought to a conclusion until a late hour. When Francis Barclay was released from the reporters' table, he recollected that he had left his great-coat hanging up in the bank. He would have had no objection to its remaining there until the next day, had not his notes of the public meeting, the proceedings of which he had reported in the middle of the day, reposed in the great-coat pocket.

He could not go home until he had translated his notes, and left them at the different newspaper offices; so he walked quickly past the General Post Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, and along Cheapside, until he reached Broad Street.

Like Mr. Sandford Saville, he went to the door in the court, and rang the bell. In a short time his summons was responded to by Mrs. Posh, who was still engaged with her friend Mrs. Wall.

It was then about half-past eleven, and Mr. Saville could not have left the premises ten minutes. It was fortunate for him that the speeches at the Albion had lasted so long as they had.

‘Who is it?’ said Mrs. Posh, shading the candle with her hand to prevent its being extinguished by the wind.

‘Me—Mr. Barclay.’

‘O, it’s you, Mr. Barclay,’ said Mrs. Posh. ‘Come in, sir; and what can I do for you?’

‘Why, I am sorry to disturb you at this late hour of the night, but I have left my great-coat, with all my papers in the pocket. I have been at a meeting all the evening reporting, and I want the notes, as I must put them in English before I go home, because the newspapers will expect them; and now I think of it, Mrs. Posh, I will sit down in the counting-house and transcribe the shorthand there. I shall not be half an hour.’

‘Very well, sir. You can do as you please,’ replied Mrs. Posh. ‘I wonder where the dogs are? Asleep, I suppose. It’s odd, too; they generally make a rare noise when anybody comes, and I haven’t heard them all the evening. O yes, sir, you can stop as long as you like. I’ve got a friend up-stairs, and she won’t be going just yet. When you’ve done your work, sir, p’raps you will kindly give me a call, and I’ll come down and let you out, and see that the doors are properly shut and locked on the inside.’

‘I’ll do that, Mrs. Posh. If you lend me your candle, do you think you can find your way up-stairs in the dark?’

‘I ought to, sir, seeing the many times I’ve been up and down stairs,’ replied Mrs. Posh, with a little old-fashioned laugh peculiarly her own.

Francis Barclay took the light from Mrs. Posh, and walked into the counting-house, which was at the front of the building. This again was for-

tunate for Sandford Saville, and unfortunate for the young man, who was unwittingly piling up a mountain of circumstantial evidence which he would find it difficult, if not impossible, to refute.

He found his great-coat hanging upon a peg behind his desk, took from its pocket the shorthand notes of the meeting in the middle of the day, and, sitting down, worked diligently for some time, summarising the proceedings of both meetings, and making a very readable report for the perusal of the next morning's papers. It took him some time to do all this, for he had two reports to make; he wrote on a peculiar sort of paper, which carried the impression of the pen, through the medium of some coloured material, to another sheet beneath, which saved him some little labour.

Having finished his task, he got up, only too glad to have finished his task. He stood at the foot of the stairs and called for Mrs. Posh, who at once hobbled down the staircase.

'I am much obliged to you for letting me in,' said Francis Barclay. 'I had no right to expect so much indulgence at this time of night. I am very much obliged to you.'

Francis Barclay walked back to Highgate. There were no omnibuses at that late hour, and he could not afford to take a cab.

He called on his way at the various newspaper offices to which he was under an obligation to deliver copy, and as most of them had their local habitation in or about Fleet Street, he walked up Chancery Lane and made his way home through the many winding and tortuous streets which lay between Bloomsbury Square and Camden Town.

The next morning Francis Barclay rose rather later than usual. It was half-past eight before he got up, and he was due at the bank at ten. He began breakfast at nine, and got through that uninteresting meal as hurriedly as possible.

He had the mortification of seeing his own particular 'bus rolling along the highway at a considerable distance, and, although he shouted until he felt hoarse, the obtuse conductor, who was probably 'full inside,' would not recognise him.

It was nearly half-past ten when he arrived at the bank, and he was surprised to see a small crowd round the entrance. As he entered, and pushed the swing-doors on one side, he was still more surprised to remark that two men of rather seedy appearance, but gifted with lawyer-like physiognomies, fixed their regards upon him in an unpleasant manner.

Those gentlemen were Messrs. Barr and Banister, the famous detectives of the City police force.

When the young men attached to the bank arrived in the course of the morning they discovered that a burglary had been committed, that the safe had been forced open, and that the dogs were dead.

Their alarm was great; and when Mr. Sandford Saville arrived, at ten o'clock, his appearance, as manager of the bank, was hailed with great satisfaction. The clerks were sitting in their places, doing the small amount of work which was necessary at that early hour. Some, however, were standing in little knots, and discussing the great question of the moment. It was clear and undeniable that the safe had been broken open,

and that a large amount of treasure had been stolen therefrom. Mrs. Posh was interrogated, and she immediately fell on her knees and burst into tears.

‘O, Mr. Saville! O, sir!’ she cried, as soon as the manager arrived. ‘It’s awful for me to be accused of this ’ere burglary, which I never so much as dreamt of. It’s all along of my good nature; and Mrs. Wall, she told me so, which I was foolish not to take notice of.’

‘Come, come, my good woman, you must know something about it!’ exclaimed Mr. Saville, who was very pale and agitated. ‘You were in the house, and a robbery of this magnitude could not have been committed without your connivance.’

‘O, sir! Don’t, sir! say that, sir!’ said Mrs. Posh, in an agony of apprehension. ‘It was Mr. Barclay, if it was any one.’

‘Eh! whom do you say?’

‘Mr. Barclay, sir.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘He came here last night, sir, at eleven o’clock,’ said Mrs. Posh, still on her knees, and holding her hands clasped.

‘Come here, to the bank, do you mean?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘What did he come for?’

O, the look of joy and exultation which took possession of Mr. Sandford Saville’s face! His worn look gave place to a gladsome one, and he was a different man in an instant. It was strange that the metamorphosis should be so instantaneous, but when he saw that it was probable that another would be accused, a heavy load was lifted off his shoulders, and he could afford to breathe once more.

‘He said he came for some shorthand notes he left in his coat-pocket.’

‘Did you see his coat hanging up?’

‘No, sir, I did not.’

‘How long was he here?’

‘A good half-hour, sir.’

‘Were you with him?’

‘No, sir. This is how it was: he said he would go into the counting-house and put his shorthand notes into English, and I made no objection, thinking him a gentleman, and one as meant no harm. Well, sir, I happened to have a friend of mine up-stairs, by name Mrs. Wall: thinking as I wouldn’t leave her to herself, I went up-stairs, and—’

‘Do I understand you, Mrs. Posh,’ said the bank manager, ‘that Mr. Barclay was alone during the half-hour you were up-stairs with your friend?’

‘Quite alone, sir.’

‘And had every opportunity of doing just as he liked?’

‘He had, sir.’

Another gleam of sunshine beamed from Mr. Saville’s face, but he turned to the crowd of people around him, saying:

‘We must not judge this young man hastily. Circumstances are certainly against him, but circumstantial evidence is at all times hazardous and untrustworthy. He may be guilty, and on the other hand, as I said before, he may be innocent. It is not for us to judge him.’

‘If you please, sir,’ exclaimed Mr. Morley, the head cashier, ‘the clerk I sent to the police-station has returned with detectives Barr and Bannister.’

‘O, very well! Let them come in. I will place them in possession of the whole of the evidence.’

Barr was a talkative man, and he did the elocutionary part of the business. Bannister was the sleuth-hound, and raked up evidence, and hunted people down, and stuck to a clue like a leech. They always worked in couples. They could not get on without one another. In his own particular way, each was clever.

Barr approached Mr. Saville, and exclaimed :

‘I hear there’s been a bit of a crack here, sir?’

‘Yes, there has, I am sorry to say, and property to the amount of—’

He was about to betray himself, and say fifty thousand pounds, when he checked himself most opportunely, and added :

‘How much did you say, Mr. Morley?’

‘Well, sir, as well as we can judge at present, close upon half a hundred in notes has vanished—that is to say, half a hundred thousand.’

‘It is a large sum, sir, a very large sum,’ replied Barr.

Then Mr. Sandford Saville and Mr. Morley enlightened the detectives, and told them everything which had as yet come to their knowledge, and Messrs. Barr and Bannister listened with the greatest attention, making no remark, but drinking all in.

By way of conclusion, Mr. Sandford Saville said, ‘I think you will be fully justified in taking Mr. Francis Barclay into custody; but bear in mind, that if a question of bail arises, I shall be most happy to put it in for him to any extent, so great is the respect I have for him and his family.’

‘Very well, sir,’ replied Barr, ‘I’ll keep my eye upon the young gentleman. I shouldn’t like to arrest him all at once. It would please me, if you’ve no objection, to keep my eye upon him for a certain time, and watch his movements.’

‘Very well, I have no wish whatever,’ replied Mr. Saville, ‘to interfere with the police in the execution of their duty. Exercise your own discretion.’

So Messrs. Bannister and Barr posted themselves at the entrance of the bank, and having had Mr. Barclay described to them, experienced no difficulty in finding out the supposed culprit as he entered the Royal Bubble Bank from Old Broad Street.

Francis Barclay, preserving the *mens conscia recti*, walked through his fellow clerks to his accustomed place, without taking any notice of the birds of ill-omen, and whistled blithely as he went for want of thought.

Mr. Sandford Saville, on the other hand, sat down in a nervous and expectant manner, awaiting the issue with impatience.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

MR. SANDFORD SAVILLE spoke to Mr. Morley the head cashier, and Mr. Morley spoke to somebody else, as soon as Francis Barclay was seen to enter the bank. Then Mr. Morley beckoned to detectives Barr and Bannister, and those worthies

stealthily followed the young man, who had gone into the manager's room to report to that functionary about some little matter of business which had lately engaged his attention.

Barclay was surrounded as by the sinuous folds of a gigantic anaconda. There was no escape for him. Mrs. Posh, that hysterical and weak-minded female, having by an effort of will dismissed the idea that her last hour had come, had suffered herself to be persuaded to take a seat, upon which she sat with a doleful visage, as if she fully expected to be carried off to prison, there to pass the remnant of a blighted and miserable existence.

With a preliminary 'hem!' in order to clear his throat and ease his conscience, Mr. Sandford Saville proceeded to address Barclay, upon whom, owing to Mrs. Posh's revelation, suspicion had fallen.

'You are late this morning, Barclay.'

'Yes, sir. I was up till a late hour last night.'

'Now I must caution you against making incautious replies to any questions I may put to you, Barclay.'

'Caution me, sir!' cried the clerk, as his countenance fell.

'Yes. You are in the presence of two police-officers, who are no doubt making notes of every word that falls from your lips, and any incautious admission, I am bound in candour and frankness to say, will be used in evidence against you.'

'Police-officers—incautious admission—used in evidence against me!' repeated Francis Barclay, turning the colour of ashes, and looking as intensely surprised as if he had seen the ghost of a

friend. 'What do you mean, sir?—what do you mean?'

'Why, just this. I think I may as well tell him, Mr. Morley?'

'You will use your own discretion, sir,' returned the cashier, who was looking very grave, as became the solemnity of the occasion.

'Well, yes. He must know it, sooner or later, and it had better come from me than from the officers of justice. The fact is, Barclay, the bank was broken into last night, and a considerable amount of property stolen from the iron safe. The—'

'The bank robbed!' cried Barclay. 'Broken into' O, my God, and I was here.'

This crushing reflection seemed to overwhelm him entirely. The fact that the bank had been robbed did not disturb him as much as the reflection that he had visited the bank late at night. Everything flashed upon him in an instant. He saw the inevitable construction that would be placed upon his conduct by every one. The bank had been robbed. He went to the bank on the night of the robbery, giving a suspicious excuse to the housekeeper; and, of course, was either the guilty party or a confederate of a daring gang of burglars. Unhappily for him, burglaries in the City had been very numerous of late. Several of the richest jewellers had had their shops broken into and pilfered. The state of affairs was considered alarming in the extreme. The police was looked upon as next to useless, and everybody was wishing for and looking forward to the capture of the horde of robbers, who were the terror of merchants and tradesmen.

Mrs. Posh thought that the time had arrived when it was incumbent upon her in self-defence to say something to clear her character ; so, standing up, she said, in a deeply tragic voice,

‘O, Mr. Barclay, sir, don’t go for to deny it all, and get a poor lone widdy woman into trouble. Up like a man, sir, and say as how you’ve done it, and you hopes the court will have mercy upon you on account of your youth.’

‘Sit down, my good woman, sit down,’ said Mr. Sandford Saville. ‘I cannot allow the proceedings to be interrupted by your noisy and purposeless demonstrations.’

Mrs. Posh resumed her seat with an elaborate bow, which was intended as an indication of humility, but which breathed defiance and insubordination.

‘Take a chair, Barclay,’ said Mr. Saville, as the young man staggered totteringly towards the mantelpiece and leant his arm upon it, placing his drooping head upon his coat-sleeve.

‘No, thank you, I would rather stand,’ was the faint reply.

‘You know, Barclay, that I have always taken the—the—I may say the deepest interest in you,’ continued Mr. Saville. ‘I have looked upon you as a very promising and industrious young man. I have given you encouragement to the best of my ability, and it grieves me beyond the power of expression to find you in the very unpleasant dilemma in which you now are. I suppose you do not intend to deny that you were here last night?’

‘No, sir,’ said Barclay, raising his head and looking at those who were standing round with a

fearless countenance and a flashing eye; 'I admit most fully that I was here for some time last night, but I deny, in the most forcible, emphatic, and indignant manner that I was here with any felonious intention.'

'That,' said Mr. Sandford Saville, 'is a matter to be decided by the magistrates, and, I am afraid, subsequently by a jury. But I will say this before you all,' he added, turning to the onlookers,—'I will say this, that I do not believe Mr. Barclay is guilty of the crime with which he will soon stand charged; I don't think for a moment that he is guilty, although appearances, it must be admitted, are dead against him. At present the evidence is more circumstantial than direct, and I declare unhesitatingly that I will, with the utmost pleasure, put in bail to any amount for him.'

A slight murmur of applause was heard at the end of this speech; for Barclay was a good fellow, and a favourite with those amongst whom it was his daily lot to associate.

The effect of these words upon Barclay was extraordinary. He sprang forward, and caught Mr. Saville by the hand, wringing it heartily, and showing the most violent symptoms of extreme gratitude.

'God bless you for that!' he exclaimed. 'Perhaps I shall some day have an opportunity of showing my gratitude to you for your great kindness. It is one consolation to know that you do not believe me guilty; and I declare, as Heaven hears me, that I am as innocent of this crime as—as'—he wanted a simile, and said—'as you are.'

Mr. Bannister, the detective, approached, and said,

‘I think, sir, the time has arrived for us to go to the Mansion House. The Lord Mayor will be taking his seat soon, and when the night charges are disposed of we shall come on. I think you said you were prepared to give this young gentleman in charge for robbing the bank?’

‘On suspicion, constable.’

‘It’s the same thing, sir, till it’s proved. I shall want you, sir, as manager, the cashier, the housekeeper, and the clerk who shut up the safe last night before leaving the bank.’

‘That was me,’ said a Mr. Eastlake.

‘Very well, sir. Then I will trouble you to join in the procession.’

Bannister made a sign to Barr, who approached Barclay, and produced a pair of handcuffs.

‘Hold out your hands!’ he said, in a rough tone.

‘O no! Do not put those on! I am not guilty; besides, it is unnecessary. I will go quietly enough. If I were a violent character, and you apprehended personal violence at my hands, it would be another thing. Do not handcuff me; I will go quietly enough.’

‘It’s our rule. Besides, it’s safer. Who knows, you might see a chance and bolt, and then the public would say, “Well, I never! what was Barr and Bannister about? That ain’t the way they does business usually.”’

‘Mr. Saville, speak for me to these men, will you?’ appealed Barclay, in a pleading tone.

‘Really, Mr. Barr, I think you are exceeding your duty in taking such extraordinary precautions,’ said Mr. Sandford Saville.

The phrase ‘exceeding your duty’ did not appear at all palatable to Barr, for he said,

‘I’m the best judge, sir, of what my duty is, and what is an ordinary and what an extraordinary precaution. Do you give this young man in charge or not?’

‘It is my painful duty, in obedience to the facts before me, to do so; though I sincerely hope—’

‘Never mind what you hopes. He’s give in charge, and I shall put the bracelets on,’ concluded the detective.

A shudder convulsed Barclay’s frame as the cold steel touched his naked flesh. He wore one of those large overcoats known as an Inverness cape, and he thrust his manacled hands beneath its folds as if anxious to hide his disgrace.

Mr. Saville also seemed perturbed at this stern behaviour of the police, for he sat down as if unable to stand up, and his legs trembled as if the weight of his body was too much for them to support. Those who noticed him, put it down to a natural dislike to see a young man’s career blighted in its outset. They took it to be an indication of goodness of heart, and gave him credit for possessing more sensibility than had cropped up to the surface before.

‘He can’t be such a bad fellow if he feels like that,’ muttered Mr. Morley.

The messenger was sent for two cabs; for, although the distance was short, Mr. Saville did not wish to be observed and spoken to by his friends as he went through the streets to the Mansion House.

When the party arrived at that palatial residence, they proceeded at once to the inspector’s office, and the charge against Francis Barclay was

entered upon the charge-sheet, and subsequently on the books of the establishment.

A couple of drunken women, sent to gaol for a fortnight, were dragged, howling and screaming, into the cells, and Francis Barclay's flesh crept as he thought he should have to herd with such as they were.

'God help me!' murmured the poor fellow, 'I have little to expect from man, therefore I will hope the more for aid from heaven.'

At twelve o'clock the business of the court was nearly over, the night charges had been got rid of, the summonses granted, and Barclay was arraigned at the bar, or, more correctly, placed in the dock, charged with having committed a burglary on the premises of the Royal Bubble Bank, situated in Old Broad Street. Mr. Eastlake was the first witness examined. He proved leaving the bank at a certain hour, placing so much bullion in the safe, and so much money in notes. He stated that the dogs were well and healthy, and that all the usual precautions were taken.

Mrs. Posh succeeded the last witness, and she said that Mr. Francis Barclay, whom she knew well as being one of the clerks in the bank, had called at the private door in the court at a late hour and demanded admittance, as he had left some shorthand notes in his coat pocket. She gave him permission to go into the counting-house, thinking no harm, and he stopped there some time. When he went away he called her down to lock the door after him, and she went up-stairs again to her friend, and knew nothing about the robbery till the morning, when she saw the dogs dead.

The magistrate kindly suggested that a remand would probably enable the accused to produce witnesses and fortify his defence.

In reply to this, Barclay vehemently declared his innocence, stated that he could say no more if the case were remanded for a month, and asked that he should either be discharged or that the case should be sent for trial.

As he said this, a card was put in his hand by one of the officers of the court. On it was written :

‘Mr. Candlemass, solicitor—Fee, two guineas.’

‘What is this?’ said Barclay to the officer.

‘Hand him the money, sir, and he’ll speak up for you, sir.’

‘O, I see. You mean he will conduct my case.’

‘That’s it.’

Barclay felt in his pocket, and produced two pounds and two shillings.

‘Here you are,’ he said. ‘Give Mr. Candlemass the money.’

The magistrate was busily engaged in looking over some papers which the clerk had placed before him. They were the depositions in the case. When he looked up, and it was possible to catch his eye, a little stout man with a florid face and iron-gray hair jumped up in the body of the court, and said, in a clear business-like voice, the tones of which were heard in every corner of the large room :

‘My lord, I appear for the accused, and I respectfully submit that the evidence against him is so slight as not even to justify a remand. I call upon your lordship to discharge him.’

‘That is simply impossible. I will grant a remand if you wish it,’ said the Lord Mayor.

‘We have no objection to a remand, my lord, provided the question of bail—’

‘I am ready to put in bail for any amount,’ exclaimed Mr. Saville.

‘And I,’ cried a voice in the crowd.

Every one turned round to see who the speaker was. The voice was so deep and so sonorous, possessing such a powerful cadence, that it went direct to the susceptibilities of the hearer. Mr. Saville caught sight of a tall man with dark hair, bushy whiskers, and a long beard of the same colour. The countenance was striking, the nose aquiline, the mouth well cut, the lips full and determined, the forehead high and massive. Barclay saw him, too; but neither the clerk nor the manager ever remembered having seen him before.

‘In the event of my accepting bail for the prisoner,’ said the Lord Mayor, ‘I should require two sureties of a thousand pounds each, and the prisoner himself in fifteen hundred; but, on consideration, I am inclined to remand the case for a week.’

‘Will you accept bail in the mean time?’ said Mr. Candlemass.

‘No.’

‘My lord?’

‘I cannot hear you now. The prisoner stands remanded.’

The witnesses were bound over and left the court, while Francis Barclay was taken below to the cells. As he passed, the stranger who had offered to put in bail for his reappearance said,

‘Keep up your spirits ; you have friends in a quarter you do not dream of.’

Barclay looked up to thank this unknown benefactor, but when he did so he was gone ; he could only see his tall form retreating and vanishing in the distance.

He was locked up in the cells and left to his own reflections until four o’clock, when he was bundled into a police-van and carried off to a house of detention, where he languished on bread and water for a week. On his reappearance he was fully committed for trial ; but as the Old Bailey sessions were then nearly over, he had the disagreeable prospect of languishing in prison for nearly two months. His only comfort was the consciousness of possessing an innocent mind, and a firm hope that he would finally be delivered from the toils into which he had been entrapped. His wife visited him whenever opportunity permitted, and he waited with impatience for the day of trial to arrive.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET POISONER.

ALPHONSE PASTILLE was one of those clever Frenchmen who devote their lives to chemical analyses. He had from his earliest youth been a chemist. His first house of business was at Bordeaux ; he did not practise there more than five years. Pastille was a man who believed in his own talent, and thought, with considerable justice, that the provincial town did not offer sufficient scope for his abilities.

He determined to go to Paris, which he accordingly did. At that time society in the capital was in a very corrupt state, and Pastille found it more profitable and more to his purpose to pander to the vices of the aristocracy than he did to adhere to legitimate trade.

In those days the state was unhinged and disjointed. Revolutions occurred periodically; everything was venal and corrupt. Such being the case, it is not surprising that there was occasionally a demand for subtle poisons. This demand Pastille met, and he acquired the reputation of a Cagliostro in Paris, where he was appreciated.

For some years Pastille flourished like a green bay-tree; but it so happened that one or two ugly affairs were brought to light, and the great chemist's name figured unpleasantly in a prominent manner before the public. No one was so much disgusted at this as Pastille himself, and, with praiseworthy prudence and determination, he resolved to leave the country.

This he succeeded in doing, and contrived to carry the bulk of his property to London, where he established a perfumery business in Soho Square.

Pastille's reputation travelled with him, and he was amongst the initiated regarded as a great authority upon poisons; and many rich people, who wished—so they said—to kill a few rats or put a dog out of the way, drove up in their carriages to Soho Square, under pretence of going to the Bazaar, and quietly went into Pastille's, ostensibly for perfumery, but in reality to purchase some of the deleterious drugs in which he dealt.

It was darkly whispered that Alphonse Pastille was acquainted with the poison secrets of the

Middle Ages; that all the hidden and mystic lore of the alchemists had descended to him, and that he could poison, like the Medicis and the Borgias, without any living medical man being able to detect the slightest symptoms of a foreign and deadly agent in the stomach or blood of the deceased.

Mrs. Sandford Saville had heard of Pastille, and his fame as a seller of poisons had reached her ears. Up to the present time she had not had occasion to try his skill or put his cleverness to a test.

She hated Maurice Fenwick with a fierce and deadly hatred, and resolved to prevent his paying his addresses to her daughter in future; and when she hated it was to the death.

It was late, but Alphonse Pastille was not a man to retire to rest at an early hour. People who commit crime, and are guilty of deeds unworthy of their manhood, generally select the dead of night, or at all events that part of the day when the shades of night have fallen, so that the eye of man may not witness the iniquity they are about to perpetrate. Mrs. Saville therefore liked the night-time. She was better able to scheme and plot when the stars were shining than when the sun illuminated that part of the world which it favoured with its presence.

She was ushered into a small room on the ground floor when she arrived at Alphonse Pastille's residence and her servant had knocked at the door. The shop was shut, and entrance had to be sought through the private door.

Mr. Pastille did not keep his visitor waiting long. He gave her just sufficient time to look around her, to scan the apartment and rest briefly

upon its horrors, and then made his appearance.

He was a little man, small even for a Frenchman, very thin and sallow, with high and prominent cheek-bones. His mouth was small and contracted, his lips thin, his nose aquiline, his eyes sharp, small, and piercing, his forehead narrow, though it was well developed at the temples.

He wore a dressing-gown of black serge, cinched at the waist with a piece of common cord, tied in a knot in front.

He bowed as he entered, and said,

‘I am Alphonse Pastille; may I ask you to tell me your business?’

‘You are a chemist, I believe, as well as a perfumer?’

‘I am.’

‘Do you sell poisons?’

‘It entirely depends. I always inquire for what purpose a poison is wanted. Are the rats in your house troublesome, Mrs.—?’

‘Norman.’

‘O, thank you, Mrs. Norman. Is your larder infested with rats?’

‘It may be, but I leave those things almost entirely to the servants.’

‘Thank you. It is for a dog, then, that you want the deleterious drug. I can supply some capital strychnine which will do the business for you with great rapidity.’

‘It is not a dog either,’ replied Mrs. Sandford Saville.

‘In-deed!’ said Pastille, raising his eyebrows. ‘I am mistaken again.’

‘You are.’

‘Then I must inform you, madam, that I do not sell poisons for any other than a legitimate purpose.’

‘In that case I have been greatly misinformed.’

‘Possibly, madam,’ returned Pastille, with equanimity; ‘I am not responsible for all the calumnious reports which my enemies may spread abroad respecting me.’

‘Certainly not; but—shall I tell you what I have heard?’

‘If you please, madam.’

‘My friends have said to me: “O, my dear Mrs.—a—Norman, if you wish to rid yourself of a tiresome and importunate person, go to Pastille—he is invaluable in such cases, and will give you great satisfaction. By all means employ him.”’

‘May I inquire the name of your friend?’

‘I shall give it you in strict confidence.’

‘Of course.’

‘My friend is the Countess of Landydown.’

‘Really! I am charmed to meet with a lady who is acquainted with one of my best customers,’ said Pastille, with a smile of gratulation. ‘I have no doubt that, as you are in her ladyship’s confidence, she has mentioned my terms to you. You perceive that I am treating you confidentially, and I do so because the name you have mentioned has a talismanic virtue about it, which to me is irresistible.’

‘I think there was some mention of a fixed sum,’ said Mrs. Saville.

‘O, no! excuse me for so abrupt a contradiction. We have no fixed sum here; everything is done on a graduating scale—the greater the risk, the larger the amount to be paid.’

‘Ah, I see!’

‘What was the sum named to you, madam?’

‘A hundred pounds.’

‘H’m—that is the consulting fee; and if madam will have the goodness to pay that at once, we can proceed to business.’

‘You will defer to my wishes?’ said Mrs. Saville hesitatingly.

‘Always provided madam is prepared to pay the price.’

‘Tell me what you want, and you shall have it.’

‘For what?’

‘Never mind for what. Tell me what you want.’

‘Two hundred and fifty pounds,’ replied Pastille, with an unflinching countenance.

‘The sum is exorbitant; but I will give it you on the understanding that you will give me the drug of which I am in search.’

‘Name it.’

‘I cannot, for I do not know its name, though I am told you possess it.’

‘Tell me its properties,’ said Pastille.

Mrs. Saville looked hard at the perfumer, and replied:

‘It does not kill, this drug I am looking for. It simply paralyses.’

‘Ah, Belphegor!’ cried the chemist. ‘You allude to that famous decoction of gauinas which was brought to perfection by Dr. Dre. You are right when you say that it does not kill, and simply paralyses. You are not in the habit of mincing words, madam, for Belphegor has the inestimable advantage over all other drugs of paralysing both the body and the brain. The

man who drinks it becomes a hopeless, purposeless idiot.'

'That is it; that is what I want. Give me a phial of Belphegor.'

Mrs. Saville, as she spoke, produced a portemonnaie elaborately ornamented with pearls, ivory, and gold; from this she took in notes—the very notes that her husband had stolen from the Royal Bubble Bank of which he was manager—two hundred and fifty pounds, the large sum that Alphonse Pastille had stipulated for before he would give his advice or deliver the drug of which she stood in need.

'There,' she said, pushing the crisp and fluttering notes over to him, 'take the money, and give me the Belphegor.'

Alphonse Pastille adjusted his spectacles on his nose, looked critically at them by the light of a lamp which stood on the table, counted them with scrupulous exactitude, folded them up, and placed them in his pocket.

For full a minute he did not move.

This quiescence, this extraordinary calm, alarmed Mrs. Saville, who exclaimed in an eager and tremulous voice, 'The Belphegor; give me the Belphegor!'

'I am at your service, madam,' replied the professor of chemistry blandly; 'it is not a drug I keep ready-made upon the premises, and I was recalling the ingredients, so as to save a reference to my scientific books.'

'Pardon me,' said Mrs. Saville, 'I did not know.'

'I must leave you alone for a quarter of an hour,' continued the professor.

‘And my money?’

‘You shall have its value on my return.’

‘When will that be?’

‘I have told you.’

‘But—’

‘Be content to trust me, madam. I must have implicit confidence placed in me. If I do pander to the vices of mankind, it does not follow that I am utterly untrustworthy.’

‘Enough! I trust you, and shall stay here till your return,’ said Mrs. Saville, who felt wearied by the chemist’s pertinacious remarks respecting his honesty.

Pastille went to his laboratory, and there concocted the diabolical mixture which was to deprive the one to whom it was administered of health and reason. He experienced no compunction when completing his horrid task. He did not care an atom what the consequences of his work would be as long as he was paid for what he did, and well paid. He fused some metal in a crucible, and then mixed it with a pungent vegetable essence. When the commingling was finished he poured it into a phial, and took it to his customer.

Mrs. Saville eagerly snatched it out of his hand, and holding it up to the light, said:

‘Is this it? Is this what you call Belphegor? And will it do what you say?’

‘You have my word that it will. If you are incredulous, try it upon yourself, here in this room.’

‘Do you think me mad?’

‘Not for an instant.’

‘Well, suppose everything you say of this

Belphegor to be true, I should be immolating myself.

‘Excuse me; you would not,’ said Pastille, with one of his habitual smiles, grim and mysterious.

‘And why?’

‘I have the antidote.’

‘I am sorry there is an antidote. I wish my work to be final. I wish to do whatever I undertake in the most decisive manner! Is the antidote known to any one but yourself?’

‘To no one. The bane is my property, and so is the antidote. Will you try the effects of both upon yourself? I will guarantee that you experience nothing but a slight heaviness—a drowsy feeling, with a passing faintness, which a cordial I have shall cure.’

Mrs. Sandford Saville hesitated for some time, she could not make up her mind to submit to the ordeal which the perfumer suggested to her. He might be mistaken after all, his antidote might not be so powerful as his bane; and if it were not, she would be reduced to a shocking condition, to which death was preferable.

‘I am satisfied,’ she said, ‘perfectly satisfied; give me the Belphegor, and on no account part with the antidote.’

‘You may rely upon my discretion, madam,’ said Pastille.

He opened the door, and his visitor was bowed into her carriage, in which she departed, carrying with her the wherewithal to blight the existence of any one whom she might curse with her hatred.

And who was the unhappy being who had incurred her resentment?

Maurice Fenwick; and for him the drug was intended. For his especial injury had she bought it, and upon him she was fully resolved to experiment. It is hardly possible to believe in so much wickedness; but an ambitious and a mercenary woman is capable of almost anything.

CHAPTER XVI.

POSSESSING A SECRET

LUKE FENTYMAN, having been baffled in his attack upon Lord Linstock, was all the more determined to follow up the slight clue he had obtained, and in order to do so it was necessary for him to go to the Pantiles and see if he could not derive some information from the dumb girl, Mula.

If she could be made by threats or promises to reveal what she evidently had locked up in her breast, and tell the secrets of her deceased mistress, he would be in a position to make his fortune, as he had some time ago hoped to do.

Luke Fentyman was one of those outcasts of civilisation whose lines are hard and not cast in pleasant places. No home could Luke call his own, no fireside had he to own him master, no wife to call him husband, no children to lisp the name of father!

He was a wanderer in the streets of the great City.

The only clothes he possessed were the wretched apologies for covering which he carried upon his

back, so that when the rain had penetrated to his skin and made him ache with cold, and fearful of coming rheumatism, all he could do was to steal furtively into the taproom of a low public-house, and dry himself by the powerful coke-fire which the landlord was at all times good enough to provide for the use and benefit of his customers.

It was in this way that he drove the cold out of his bones on the present occasion, and when he felt drier, he warmed himself internally with some brandy-and-water, and felt himself equal to the task of going to the Pantiles—for in the old house at the top of the court he expected to find Mula.

Nor was he mistaken.

She had remained in possession of the house since her mistress's death, and Lord Linstock had told her that she might look upon it as her own, and make her living by letting lodgings, as Patience Pomfret had done before her.

The poor and friendless dumb girl was very grateful for this concession, and felt as if some generous benefactor had provided her with the means of subsistence for life. She thanked his lordship in her own expressive way over and over again, bending her head, beating her chest, and waving her arms as if she felt herself under a deep obligation to him.

Luke Fentyman knocked at the door of the house, which was opened by Mula.

'I've been given to understand,' said Luke, 'that you let lodgings. Have you got a room to spare at about four shillings a week?'

Mula took up a slate which rested on the floor and against the wall; a piece of pencil was at-

tached to it by a string. On the slate she wrote those answers which nature had, for some unaccountable reason, precluded her from uttering.

‘Yes. I let lodgings, but I have only one room to let at present, and that is six shillings a week.’

‘Well, it’s too hard on a working man. But lodgings is awful dear everywhere. The poor are being turned out of their houses to make room for Metropolitan improvements, and I’m sure it’s difficult to find room even in a common lodging-house, even if you go to the best of the lot and pay sixpence a night for the accommodation.’

‘I shall want a week’s money in advance,’ wrote Mula.

‘Well, you shall have it. Can’t I go inside? It’s so cold standing out here. Take us inside, if you please, mum, and let’s settle this ’ere business by the fire. If so be as it’s agreeable to you.’

Putting the slate under her arm, she beckoned him in, shut the door, and led the way down-stairs into the kitchen, which was her own apartment, and where she passed most of her time.

Luke Fentyman congratulated himself upon having so easily effected an entry into the house.

He had anticipated some difficulty, but so unsuspecting was Mula’s nature, that she did not for a moment imagine that the strange, rough-looking man whom she had admitted was contemplating the commission of an injury of which she was to be the victim.

When the kitchen was reached, Luke found a cheerful fire burning in the grate, a carefully-snuffed tallow candle was on the table, and the shutters were closed; so, although it was still

light without, Mula's ideas of comfort induced her to shut out the wet and miserable weather.

Mula offered her visitor a chair, and wrote on the slate :

‘What are you?’

As she held it up for Luke to read it, that worthy said to himself,

‘She is inquisitive, eh? I'll see if I can't make a few replies which will puzzle her.’

‘I'm a detective by trade.’

‘In the police?’

‘Yes. I don't always dress as bad as I am now.’

‘O! what is your business in this neighbourhood?’

‘I have a little job on.’

‘Indeed! May I ask what it is?’

‘I don't mind telling you. It's quite a romance.’

Then he added to himself:

‘What sort of a tale shall I tell her? I think I'd better keep on the real thing I have in hand, and see how she nibbles at the bait. Shall I call it bigamy on spec.? Yes. I don't think I could do better.’

‘Mind you,’ he exclaimed, ‘what I say to you is to go no further.’

‘No!’

‘Well, look here, this is how it is. A woman lived about here somewhere, and she died the other day, and some swell used to come to see her, and was with her when she died. The woman was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, and there's a kick up and a bobbery about it all, for it will come before the Divorce Court as a case of bigamy, and that's the truth!’

At this recital, Mula turned rather pale, and wrote in a trembling hand upon her slate:

‘Lived about here, do you say?’

‘Yes; I heard it was in this very court. But I shall soon find out, for when I have any matter in hand I never let it slip, nor does the grass grow under my feet.’

‘What was the name of the woman?’

‘Patience Pomfret. Did you know her?’

‘She lived in this house, and I was her servant,’ wrote Mula unguardedly.

‘O, that’s something! It appears luck’s brought me to the right shop for gaining information,’ said Luke Fentyman, with a diabolical leer.

‘Poor lady! I’m sorry she’s gone!’ wrote Mula, as if moralising. ‘I always said she was too good to live long, so she was. The best are sure to go before the bad ones.’

‘Yes, that’s in general the way,’ said Fentyman, after spelling over the remark on the slate, which was upheld for his inspection by Mula.

‘Were you long in her service?’

‘O yes; many years.’

‘Then you know all about her?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘And her previous history?’

‘Yes!’

‘In point of fact, you are acquainted with everything connected with her?’

‘I believe so.’

‘Will you tell me?’ inquired Luke Fentyman, in a wheedling tone, which he intended to be irresistibly seductive.

‘Tell you!’ said the slate, in a hesitating hand.

‘Yes. I sha’n’t hurt you, or bring your name

up in the matter. All I want to know is, who is the swell who visited Patience Pomfret? What did he want with her?’

‘What was the secret, you mean?’

‘That’s it, my dear. What a pity it is you can’t talk, because you’re so sharp, you’d be worth a fortune to the public generally. We’ve all lost a treasure in you! Tell us what the secret is, and you shall have more money than you ever dreamt of before!’

‘The secret shall never pass my lips!’ said the upheld slate.

‘Never?’

‘Never!’

‘Well, my dear, if you won’t speak, I must see if I can’t make you speak. It’s clear you know all that I want to be put in possession of.’

Springing suddenly to his feet, he rushed at the defenceless girl, and struck her a violent blow in the face, which sent her rolling on the floor, where she lay stunned.

Then he looked about the apartment for some cupboard. He found a cupboard made underneath the stairs to hold lumber. A key stood in the lock, and he opened it. The place was empty.

‘Just the thing!’ he said to himself. ‘If I put her in that for a bit, it’ll cool her courage.’

The ruffian went back to Mula. She was sitting up and groaning heavily.

Luke Fentyman tied her hands and feet together with a piece of rope, and then bundled her into the cupboard, saying,

‘I shall come back in three days. You’d better tell me all I want to know then, or you’re likely to die where you are.’

Mula looked pleadingly at him with her expressive eyes, but without producing the slightest effect upon the man, who slammed to the cupboard-door, locked it, put the key in his pocket, took up a latch-key which lay on the mantelpiece, and left the house with a stealthy catlike tread, as if fearful of arousing the inmates.

As he passed through the Pantiles he said, in a self-congratulatory tone, 'It's all right, I'm on the scent, and I'll bet a sovereign to a bad penny I'll find out the swell before the week's out.'

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ACCUSING CONSCIENCE.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Sandford Saville had contrived to procure the committal for trial of Francis Barclay, he was not able to congratulate himself upon his achievement. His character was totally different from that of his wife. He was a well-meaning man, though weak, and he would have been an honest, industrious member of society, had not his evil genius, in the shape of the woman whom he had married, been ever by his side urging him to the commission of offences which were really foreign to his nature.

An occurrence happened soon after Francis Barclay's committal for trial which he looked upon as a signal mark of retribution and divine anger. His son, Michael Saville, was arrested by the police together with Diphthong and Amen Corner, for perpetrating a swindle.

Mr. Saville knew nothing about this disas-

trous occurrence until he saw it in the new papers, and he was much distressed at the intelligence. One or two inquiries respecting the similarity of names were made of him in the City, but he denied his son, denied the existing relationship and all knowledge of the malefactor, saying, 'A mere accident, my dear sir, nothing more; a mere accident of nomenclature, I do assure you. No relative whatever. A scamp, evidently a scamp!'

Yet he was sorry for his son; he could have wished him a better fate. Mrs. Saville was furious at the occurrence, but she had not a word of sympathy for Michael. It seemed extremely unnatural to hear her denounce him and say that he deserved his fate, and that it served him very well right.

'This is very bad news. This is indeed a great blow to me!' exclaimed Mr. Saville at breakfast, when the paper made him acquainted with the overwhelming intelligence. 'I had hoped to be able to reclaim the boy! It was my idea that if I allowed him to sow his wild oats, he would settle down and become a respectable member of society.'

'Poor boy!' repeated Mrs. Saville, 'what nonsense you talk! I am very glad to think that he has met with his deserts at last.'

'But the disgrace, my dear,' mildly remarked Mr. Saville.

'It does not affect us, for very few who are acquainted with us know that the Michael Saville of the police reports is our son.'

'When I look back upon recent events,' replied Mr. Saville, with a dismal groan, 'I can't for the life of me see the difference between Michael and myself. If anything, I am the greater scoundrel of the two.'

Mrs. Saville's face clouded as she heard this self-accusatory remark. Rising from her chair, she walked to the door, and opened it to see if there was a listener outside.

The passage was clear, the landing was unoccupied, and no footfall was heard on the stairs.

Having ascertained this to be the fact, she shut the door and returned to her seat at the breakfast-table. Felicia had finished her breakfast and withdrawn to the morning-room, where she was practising some new and rather noisy operatic music.

'It must be a species of insanity that impels you to speak like that!' she exclaimed, in a low voice, which quivered with suppressed fury. 'No child of average intellect and intelligence would think of being so foolish as to utter remarks which might betray him, and allow others to participate in the keeping of a dangerous secret.'

'I simply spoke the truth,' murmured the bank manager apologetically.

'Then learn, once for all, that to speak the truth is a crime, for it may deliver you into the hands of justice; and then what is to become of your wife and family? Never let me hear another word of such trash. The difference between you and Michael is that you are clever and successful, and do things on a gigantic and colossal scale.'

With these words on her lips, the lady rose and swept from the room. It was early, and Mr. Saville did not care about arriving at the bank until eleven o'clock. His brougham was standing at the door. It always was there at a quarter to ten, and the well-bred full-blooded horses impatiently pawed the ground, as if anxious to make a start. The coachman sat immovable upon the

box, gazing steadfastly before him, but his thoughts were far away. He was perchance thinking of the coming contest for the blue riband of the turf, and wondering whether the five-shilling piece he put on 'the field' would bring him in a hundredfold, as he most ardently hoped it might.

Whenever Sandford Saville was more than usually depressed, he found some consolation in his daughter's society. She was so good and innocent, and he thought so profoundly religious, that he derived a melancholy sort of satisfaction in thinking that his household was not altogether ungodly.

When his wife left him, he got up and went down-stairs to speak a few words to Felicia, before he went into the City and commenced his daily work. She had finished playing the piano, and as well as he could distinguish through the closed door, she was reading aloud. What? He listened intently. Was it the sacred utterances of holy writ? It could be nothing else. Those long-forgotten, but now well-remembered, touching, burning words, speaking eloquently of the long hereafter and the awful punishment awaiting the persistent and incorrigible evil-doer. For some minutes the man stood there entranced.

He stood on the cold stones of the hall, listening with rapt attention to the ministrations of his daughter, who was all unconscious of the good she was doing.

It was her simple and unaffected practice to read some portion of the Scriptures aloud during the morning, and she was merely pursuing her usual and established custom.

While the bank manager listened, he became

changed. His face was for a time the index of his mind, and it was transfigured; his eyes flashed, and as they scintillated, seemed eloquent of repentance. He did not intrude upon his daughter, his heart was too full; he remained at the door of the room, an eavesdropper, until she had finished her self-imposed task and closed the book. Then he stole softly to his study, and throwing himself into an armchair, indulged in a reverie.

He frequently talked aloud when preoccupied, and on this occasion he did so. So engaged was he with his own thoughts, that he did not remark his wife's entrance into his study. She had marked him as he stood at the door of the morning-room without entering, and she had watched him into his study. She followed him with a stealthy, cat-like tread, and stood with her arms folded, and her regards fixed upon the down-turned face of the man who felt, O, so wretched, that he could have gone forth and taken away that life which he had once blessed God for giving him.

There was no blessing God now, no rejoicing, no glad exultation and joyousness of heart. He was crushed to the ground, brought level with despair and face to face with an accusing conscience, whose loud voice would not be stifled.

In the agony of his remorse, he exclaimed, in a spasmodic manner :

‘I am fully alive now to the enormity of which I have been guilty. Not content with robbing the unsuspecting depositors of the bank, I have allowed an innocent man to be dragged to prison. I have ruined him for ever, and blighted what was a promising career. What punishment do I not deserve for such pusillanimous conduct—for such arrant

cowardice? Thank heaven, it is not now too late to do justice to a persecuted individual! I will intervene at the last moment, and if the jury by which he will be tried do not acquit him, I will step forward and openly avow that I am the actual culprit, and that Justice is blind and indiscriminating.'

'Sandford!' exclaimed Mrs. Saville, in a harsh, metallic voice.

He started.

'I have been—a—been—dreaming, I think,' he muttered, as his eye quailed before the steady glance of his wife.

'So I should think. You did not hear me enter. I came to remind you that the brougham is waiting, and it is time you were in the City, attending to your bank business.'

'Yes, you are right. I feel strangely out of sorts this morning. I wonder what is the matter with me? I hope I am not going to be ill.'

He got up, put on his hat and coat, and walked with a faltering step across the hall, saying to himself:

'I wonder if she overheard me? I think not. I am sure I sincerely hope not. I do not think she did, or she would have said something.'

He stepped into the brougham, and was driven off. When Mrs. Saville was by herself she mentally exclaimed:

'He must be watched. The man is dangerous, and may spoil all. I must employ stratagem here, and get him away from the scene of action for a time. It is not safe to have him in London until the trial is over. His mind is too highly wrought. I must give my best attention to this matter.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT was a raw cold evening. The air was damp from the effects of recent rain, the sky was dull and leaden. What wind there was commended itself to the attention of the public more by its roughness than its placidity, more by its freezing chilliness than its zephyry softness.

Luke Fentyman was leaning against a lamp-post, his head hanging down, his eyes bleared, his lips parched, his skin dirty, his hair matted together, as if uncombed for some time.

The fact was, that the worthless fellow had, on leaving Mula, picked a gentleman's pocket of a purse containing two sovereigns and some silver. In order to celebrate the event congenially, he went to a flash public-house, to the landlord of which he was well known, and there he continued until he had spent every halfpenny of the money of which he had possessed himself in a dishonest manner. As long as the money lasted the landlord was civil enough, and allowed Fentyman to be uproarious and conduct himself very much as he pleased; but when the last coin was spent he resented his drunken insolence, and ejected him with an energy more forcible than pleasant.

For three days Luke Fentyman had paid his court to Bacchus. He had forgotten all about Mula; but when he found himself in the street, with his head reeling and his pulse throbbing at the rate of a hundred a minute, he thought of the poor dumb girl whom he had left shut up in the

cellar in the house of which she was the nominal mistress, if it did not belong to her in fact and law.

He had come to Whitechapel to spend his ill-gotten money; so it will be seen that he was some distance from the Pantiles.

Unless he obtained something to steady his nerves, it was clear to his muddled comprehension that he could not walk a step.

His head swam and seemed to turn round and round with a velocity that was quite alarming. He felt inclined to slide quietly into the gutter, and end his troubles in that delectable locality by going off to sleep.

This course of procedure was prevented solely by his dread of the police, who would recognise him as an old offender, and probably provide for him, at the expense of the nation, for seven days, or a longer or shorter period, as the case might be.

While he was in a state of irresolution almost amounting to despair, a little ragged urchin came up, and looking curiously at Luke, stopped short, took a more critical survey, and then burst into a loud guffaw.

This little fellow was much younger than he looked, he had such an old face when compared with his general appearance. This antiquated look is a well-known and an oft described characteristic of the very poor of London. The boy was not more than twelve years of age, and the superficial observer would not have believed him a day less than twenty. Occasionally his eye twinkled and the rigid muscles of his mouth relaxed, showing that, although wretchedly poor and living from hand to mouth, he yet had a keen sense of humour

which poverty with its iron heel had not succeeded in crushing out of him.

The lad's face was very comical to look at. It was decidedly ugly, and more like that of an ape than anything else; but a good-humoured expression, like that which is supposed to pervade the painted countenance of a clown, was always apparent.

He was known among his associates, and the rascally fraternity of Whitechapel generally, as Monkey Marvel.

He had never known the luxury of a father or a patronymic; he had always been a waif and a stray on life's ocean. His nickname had been given him owing to his having appeared at a penny show as the Whitechapel Marvel or the Infant Phenomenon. His theatrical career was unfortunately brought to a close owing to the bankruptcy of the proprietor of the penny place of entertainment.

After that he wandered about the streets, picking up a few halfpence by turning somersaults by the side of omnibuses, to the imminent risk and danger of his limbs; and he did odd jobs occasionally, such as holding horses, running errands, and occasionally even sweeping crossings.

It is sad to relate that his moral sense was perverted, and that he did not recognise the distinction between *meum* and *tuum* as he ought to have done. Butchers and cheesemongers often missed small articles exposed for sale, for the loss of which Monkey Marvel was answerable. Altogether he was a fair specimen of what, in modern phraseology, is denominated the City Arab.

It was not the fault of society that he was what

he was, so much as the natural tendency implanted in his breast for a vagrant life. He had been sent by a magistrate with philanthropic ideas to a reformatory; but, after being there for six months, and being initiated in the tailor's handicraft, he took advantage of the first opportunity and ran away.

'How long are you going to stand there, my man?' exclaimed Monkey Marvel, mimicking the voice of a man with a gruff intonation.

'As long as it suits me,' replied Luke Fentyman, who was slightly husky, through the united effects of drink and exposure. 'And who may you be, that takes it upon yourself to give me orders?'

'Why, an old friend, Luke; sorry to see that you have had more than you can carry.'

Luke opened his eyes as well as their puffed condition would permit him, and by the light of the gas-lamp against which he was leaning, recognised in the elfin mortal before him a young rogue with whom he had often come in contact.

'It strikes me, youngster,' he said, 'that you and I've met before. Now, if you'll take me somewhere so as I can get sober, I'll be the making of you.'

'That'll just suit me. I've been looking a long time for my fortune without finding it, and it'll be all the more acceptable when it does come.'

'I'll do it, then, if you'll stand my friend on this occasion. You needn't laugh. I'm all in earnest. I've got a sure card, and the event's bound to come off. Do you think you can give me a shake-down hard by? a truss of straw will do. I don't care where it is, as long as it ain't a police-station.'

‘Have you got any coin?’ inquired Monkey Marvel, with a shrewd look.

‘Not a halfpenny. Look here, it’s this way. I had a tidy sum when I went into the Three Fishes. Well, as long as the money lasted the landlord was civil; but when it was all gone old Tubbs turned me out, knowing I’d no power to help myself. Now that’s what I call unhandsome, but I’ll be square with him one of these days. I’ve got it in for him, and it won’t lose by keeping.’

It is to be presumed that by ‘it’ the drunken man alluded to his revenge, but as his faculties were obscured by drink, not much reliance is to be placed upon language which was consequently obscure.

Monkey Marvel was able to accommodate Luke Fentyman in the way he desired. He had of late been very obliging to the proprietor of a cab-yard. In return for his services, the proprietor permitted him to sleep in a stable where there was a little loose straw. This was a great favour, and regarded as an invaluable concession by the recipient of it, and saved him the expense of a lodging.

To the stable-yard Monkey Marvel took Fentyman, and shook him up a couple of armfuls of straw, upon which he was soon lying, with his mouth open, and snoring with a loudness which was extremely unpleasant to those who heard it.

The next morning Luke awoke with a racking headache, his mind and body both enfeebled with his excesses, his mouth parched so that his tongue clove to the roof of it, his eyes hot and aching, his palms fevered, his skin dry; in a word, his entire frame disorganised.

Monkey Marvel conducted him to the pump in

the yard, and pumped a refreshing stream upon him, afterwards providing him with a dram of braddy to restore his wasted energies, in accordance with the time-honoured maxim.

Bending forward, Luke said, in a voice a little above a whisper,

‘My lad!’

To which query Monkey Marvel, in the same tone, replied,

‘Guv’nor!’

‘Can you keep your tongue still?’

‘Yes.’

‘And your mouth shut?’

‘I hope so.’

‘I’d be the making of you if I thought I could trust you,’ added Luke reflectively.

‘They might cut me in pieces afore I’d ’oller,’ said Monkey Marvel, going on enthusiastically to exclaim, ‘O, my, wouldn’t I like to be put in the thumbscrews, just to show the world that it ain’t in me, but agin my natur, to split on a pal what is a pal, and no shams! Why, they might burn me in Smithfield, and cut off my head on Tower Hill, I wouldn’t so much as squeak, no, not so loud as a monse in a trap.’

‘I’ve always found you as sound as a roach,’ replied Luke Fentyman, ‘and I’m one of those chaps who always speak as they find. I told you last night I’d got a sure card, and it is so, and no mistake; but I want a bottle-holder. I want some un as will stand by me through life, and as I’m a-fighting my way through the world’ll back me up and slap me on the back and say, “Go it, Luke; that’s your sort, Luke; you’re safe to win; you’re a-going the right road; now’s your time,

Luke; get the steam up, and mind you don't bust the biler!" That's what I wants, and if I thought as how you'd jine hands with me, and be hand and glove, I'd strike a bargain.'

Stopping for a moment and fixing his eyes full on the lad, he supplemented his remarks by adding:

'What do you say?'

'Why just this 'ere, Luke—I'm with you,' replied Monkey Marvel.

'You is, Monkey?'

'Yes.'

'You ain't got nothing on hand?'

'No.'

'No pals as will interfere?'

'Not one.'

'Then you're the chap for my money. Now it's this way. You keep your ears open and listen well, 'cos I don't like to be interrupted and to have to say over twice what I've got to say. There's a party—is yer a-listnin'?''

'I is, Luke.'

'All right. Now it's this way. There's a party as I've got my peepers on, and it's a heye that don't shut longer than it's got any bis'ness to. Well, this 'ere party as I'm a-speaking of has got a secret. I know it's a secret, 'cos o' lots o' things which it isn't necessary for me to tell you now; are you a-listening?'

'In course I is. What do you want to go on asking that for?' exclaimed Monkey Marvel. 'Any one 'ud think that I was silly.'

'Stash it! I didn't mean nothin',' replied Luke, in a tone calculated to reassure his listener and allay his irritation. 'You're young, but it don't matter, you'll be old enough some day,

please you live. But it's this way. Well, this secret is known to a gal, and she's dumb—'

'Dumb!'

'Yes. She can hear fast enough, but she can't speak. If she can't speak, she can write on a slate when she is made to. T'other day she was obstinit, and I shoved her into a cupboard o' coals, all amongst the nubbly ones, and there she lies. I picked a gen'I'm's pocket, and went to the Three Fishes with the money, and I've been there for close upon three days and four nights.'

'Perhaps she's dead,' suggested Monkey Marvel, opening his mouth with wonder at the tale of which he was the auditor.

'That's what I'm beginnin' to get powerful frit about. I'm thinkin' we'd better make tracks at once for the Pantiles, where she is shut up.'

'Pantiles! That's up Old Drury way, ain't it?'

'Not far off. If you're ready, we'll make a move!'

Monkey Marvel jumped up, and putting himself by Luke Fentyman's side, prepared to leave the yard. They knew their way about town very well, and took the shortest cut from the City to the West End.

It was still early morning when they reached the Pantiles. There were few people about. St. Paul's had just struck seven. Milkmen and first postmen were the prominent figures on the pavement.

Luke was provided with the latch-key which he had taken from Mula, and he let himself in. He was quickly followed by Monkey Marvel. They descended the stairs. In the lower regions the silence of the grave prevailed.

Luke Fentyman felt his courage give way as he approached the cellar in which he had placed Mula. What if he had left her for too long a time? What if she were dead?

That would be a great and irreparable misfortune. Mula was the only key to the mystery which he was longing most ardently to solve and penetrate.

If he had been unfortunate enough through his want of sobriety to have allowed her to breathe her last in that dismal cupboard, then he would be forced to abandon all hope and give up the idea of making large sums of money out of the nervous fear and timidity of one whom he supposed to be a rich man, and one able to pay well for silence and secrecy.

He knocked at the cupboard-door and received no answer.

He put his ear to the key-hole and listened, but without hearing the slightest sound which induced him to think that Mula still lived.

Taking the key from his pocket, he handed it to Monkey Marvel, saying:

‘Do you open the door, for I’ll be hanged if I have the pluck to do it.’

His coward heart failed him, and sitting down on a chair in the kitchen, he watched the boy’s movements with an anxiety he was far from feeling on ordinary occasions.

His colour went and came, for he could not eradicate from his mind an impression that he was baffled.

CHAPTER XIX.

MATRIMONIAL TACTICS.

MRS. SAVILLE gave a grand ball in honour of her daughter's first season. All those who were in that part of the fashionable world in which Mrs. Saville moved looked forward with anxiety to invitations which it was rumoured were to be sparingly dealt out. Lord and Lady Linstock had been duly invited, and the same honour had been extended to the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman.

Lady Linstock had always been in favour of a marriage between her son and Miss Felicia Saville. It was a prudential measure which she had frequently urged upon her husband, but he had replied,

‘Let the young people see more of one another. Perhaps if we throw them in one another’s way, they may fall in love without any trouble on our part. Valentine is a good-looking fellow, and I am sure that he may go a long way before finding so agreeable and pretty a girl as Miss Saville. Do not, however, precipitate matters by mentioning the thing to Valentine. His pride may take alarm, and the whole affair will most likely fall to the ground.’

Lady Linstock saw the cogency of this reasoning, and followed her most sagacious spouse’s advice to the letter.

A year had been allowed to elapse, and Valentine had given no sign.

The state of affairs was becoming alarming.

Vague rumours reached her of eligible young men nibbling at the supposed heiress. She was afraid that the prize in the matrimonial market would be snapped up, and that her cherished scheme would fall to the ground. That would be dreadful in the extreme.

With the proceeds of the bank robbery Mrs. Saville had started a new carriage, drawn by a magnificent pair of horses. This equipage was pronounced by competent judges the most exquisite turn-out to be met with in the Park or the streets of London.

This looked like wealth, like material prosperity, and Lady Linstock remarked to her husband one day,

‘Saville must be very well off. Have you seen their new carriage?’

‘Yes; I saw it yesterday at the Horticultural Gardens. It was driving away as I came up in a hack cab. I felt considerably annoyed, I can tell you!’

‘I suppose the man is getting on.’

‘That is the only conclusion I can come to,’ replied Lord Linstock. ‘From what I know of Sandford Saville, I should say he was by far too sensible a man to outrun the constable.’

‘What is his income at the bank?’

‘A mild eight hundred.’

‘Is that all?’

‘Every penny.’

‘They say he had money with his wife,’ said Lady Linstock reflectively. ‘I’m sure he must have had, for she is haughty enough for a queen with a whole province at her back. Does he speculate?’

‘I never hear that he does.’

‘O, he must! Perhaps he is one of those quiet, still men, who are very cunning. He does not let people know all about his affairs.’

‘I have not found him very reserved.’

‘That is his art, his cleverness, his Tartuffe way of doing things; only you will not see it. If I am opinionated about anything, you invariably make a point of contradicting me. It is very hard.’

‘I’m sure I beg your pardon.’

‘O yes; you always apologise when you have hurt my feelings!’ said her ladyship, with a sigh.

‘You were talking about Valentine,’ said Lord Linstock, by way of a gentle reminder.

‘Yes. I am satisfied in my own mind that Saville has money. Taking that for granted, it will be a good thing for Valentine to marry Felicia. City people are always ready to pay for an aristocratic alliance, and we may expect a handsome *dot*. If that is refused, why, the whole thing is at an end, as a matter of course. Hadlow is mortgaged—’

‘Yes, yes,’ cried Lord Linstock in an irritated manner. ‘I know that; but what’s the use of reminding me of an unpleasant fact? I know I’m in the hands of the Jews, and that the property is mortgaged up to the hilt; but always chattering about it will not mend the matter.’

‘I wish it would. I’d talk till Doomsday.’

‘If you will permit me to make the remark,’ replied his lordship caustically, ‘I must say that you do not need that incentive. But let us be serious. I fall in with your views, and should be extremely glad to see Valentine and Felicia man

and wife. He is running wild now, and wants a check. To marry him to a good steady wife would be like putting the drag on a coach which is going down-hill. By all means, let us unite our energies, and see if we cannot bring the event about.'

The next day Lady Linstock called upon Mrs. Saville, and was extremely gracious. Her condescension and affability knew no bounds. She was good-nature itself, and Mrs. Saville was compelled to confess that she had never found her patrician acquaintance so charming.

'I hear,' said Lady Linstock, 'that you intend being quite gay this season.'

'I am obliged to dissipate a little,' said Mrs. Saville, with a melting look. 'You know I have a daughter to marry, and the dear child is so quiet and unobtrusive that she would never go anywhere or see anything if I did not contrive a few surprises now and then for her.'

'I often say to Linstock how much I wish Valentine would settle down,' said her ladyship.

'He is quite young, and young men ought not to marry too early, you know.'

'But Val is not quite so young as you think him. I wish most sincerely some nymph would fascinate him.'

'He must be hard to please.'

'I don't think he has ever seriously thought about the matter.'

'Well, really,' said Mrs. Sandford Saville, 'girls are not nearly so interesting as they used to be. They are either very reserved, prudish, and almost dowdy, or else they are fast and slangy. If a man cannot reach his ideal, and get

a girl whom he can thoroughly love and be happy with, he had much better walk away from the hymeneal altar.'

'Ah, dear Mrs. Saville, you are happier than me, for you are sure to marry your charming daughter, while I am sadly afraid that I shall have my son left on my hands, and be compelled to listen with maternal patience to the growls of an old bachelor.'

'Do not say that. He will be caught in the toils before long.'

'I wish he may, with all my heart.'

The game of matrimonial tactics does not allow the players to show their cards entirely. The skilful player contents himself with throwing out obscure hints and letting fly sly innuendoes; but both Lady Linstock and Mrs. Saville understood one another, and Mrs. Saville mentally declared that it should not be her fault if her daughter was not the Honourable Valentine's wife before the end of the London season.

Felicia meanwhile was in ignorance of what was plotted against her welfare, though she was fully conscious of a dawning affection for her on the part of Valentine Bridgeman, whose visits were more frequent, language more tender, looks fonder, and whose whole bearing was indicative of a stronger feeling than that of mere friendship.

This was neither gratifying to her pride nor agreeable to her *amour propre*.

She was not ambitious of making conquests, for she knew that she was pretty, and she was not unduly elated at the fact. She had given her heart unreservedly to Maurice Fenwick, and she was sorry for having done so.

There was something in the misty darkness of the hazy past which determined her to remain single until her lover came to her and exclaimed, 'I know all. That which was hidden has been revealed. Let the past be forgotten and buried in oblivion. I love you still, and will make you my wife.'

Her friends envied her, and Fanny Freemantle, who was as changeable as the weather, immediately veered round, transferring her allegiance from Maurice Fenwick, whom she had formerly declared to be irresistible, and the most amiable and accomplished gentleman of her acquaintance.

She now said that the Honourable Valentine was incomparably superior, that Felicia was a very lucky girl, and that she would be very foolish to reject so fine a 'chance.'

Felicia smiled faintly, and made no reply. She permitted her friends to think what they liked. It was not, in her opinion, worth her while to undeceive them.

Mrs. Saville had not forgotten her interview with Alphonse Pastille, nor had the powder he had given her escaped her memory. She was only waiting until a fitting opportunity for using the noxious drug offered itself.

Her hatred to Maurice Fenwick was quite as intense as ever, and her resolve to be awfully revenged upon him for his presumption in daring to love her daughter was as keen as it had always been.

What a revenge she had promised herself! Worse than the cruellest death a thousand times. What an iniquity! What an unutterable crime!

To paralyse the brain at the same time that the body was crippled, to have just a shimmering of intellect, a glimmer, a spark—just sufficient to enable the wretched man to comprehend the full extent of his misery, but without permitting him to divine any manner to cure the malady.

The drug, in Mrs. Sandford Saville's estimation, was nearly perfect. The only drawback, the only blot upon its surface, was that it was capable of eradication.

There was an antidote!

Pastille himself had confessed as much, and if that were the case, any one who could obtain the antidote would destroy the effect of the bane.

Maurice Fenwick was invited to the Saville mansion. On the night of the ball he made his appearance about ten o'clock.

The hour was unfashionable, and he knew it. There were not half a dozen people in the spacious drawing-room; but he hoped to have the felicity of speaking to Miss Saville.

In this hope he was disappointed, for Felicia was engaged in the mysteries of the toilette. So he wandered about like a restless spirit, or, as Miss Fanny Freemantle expressed it, 'a motherless chicken out in the snow.'

If Maurice could have imagined, as he walked up and down the brilliantly-illuminated, gaily-decorated, and gorgeously-furnished rooms, that a hideous and diabolical plot was hatching, not against his life, but against the very essence of it, he would have run with the wings of the wind to a far-distant place, where he would have been safe from the malignity of his enemies.

But he was unhappily ignorant of Mrs. Sand-

ford Saville's machinations, and went heedlessly like a lamb to the slaughter.

That very night Mrs. Saville had resolved to test the properties of the drug with which Alphonse Pastille, the French perfumer of Soho, had provided her.

That evening!

And Heaven made no sign. Truly the ways of Divine Providence are inscrutable!

CHAPTER XX.

THE POISONOUS DRAUGHT.

WHEN the evening was more advanced, the rooms began to fill.

Many who had been out to dinner went home and dressed themselves, so as to be able to put in an appearance at Mrs. Sandford Saville's ball, which was an event of the season, in its own particular way.

One thing was well known, and that was—if there happened to be a 'lion' in London, and he was procurable by any stratagem, fair or foul, Mrs. Sandford Saville was sure to have him.

She was a great admirer of 'lions,' and generally contrived to grace her *salons* with one or more of that species of successful adventurers.

The author of the last new and fashionable novel was treated with the utmost condescension by Mrs. Saville, who would point out the literary celebrity to her friends in a subdued voice, saying:

'That is Blank. You know Blank, do you

not? He wrote the new novel, *Matilda Marchbanks; or the Crushed Hyacinth and the Broken Heart*. Beautiful thing, I assure you, and well worth reading. Very clever—wonderfully clever. They say he is to dedicate his new work to royalty; but of course we must take those rumours for what they are worth. His pen is a mine of gold to him, and he is coining money.'

Of course this species of advertising made Mr. Blank the cynosure of all eyes, and lucky indeed was the distinguished gentleman if he escaped being enthralled by some dowager blue-stocking with strong literary proclivities, and 'cushioned' for the rest of the evening.

Mrs. Saville was especially remarkable for the number of foreign ambassadors she could fascinate and bring to her drawing-rooms.

The representative at her Majesty's Court of St. James's of Tahiti and the Sandwich Islands was scarcely announced before the Dahomean Ambassador rustled his silken robes in the full glare of the gaslight.

The 'lion' of the London season on the occasion of Mrs. Saville's ball was a Herr von Splattenbach, who had been a great traveller in Egypt, in which country he had made important discoveries, finding a buried city in a wilderness of sand, and, after incredible exertions, bringing to light a colossal edifice, in which was preserved some thousands of books, evidently either the collection of a man of letters or the nucleus of a State library.

Some of the manuscripts were brought to England. They were written in Syro-Chaldaic, and excited great curiosity; one in particular,

bearing upon the vexed question of perpetual motion, being much talked about.

Herr von Splattenbach was worth a great deal to Mrs. Saville, and she felt grateful to him for his condescension in coming.

Yet there was one person whose presence delighted her more than that of all the celebrities her tact had gathered around her, and that was Maurice Fenwick. Her eyes scintillated with a malignant fire as they fell upon his handsome and classic face, with its regular Grecian features, and its subdued and melancholy expression.

She knew that her daughter loved him.

She had gathered the knowledge from a thousand little things, which, collected and skilfully put together, rendered it beyond all doubt.

When Mrs. Sandford Saville made sure of the circumstance, and satisfied herself that Felicia really loved Maurice Fenwick, 'the son of the village apothecary,' as she called him, with a contemptuous curl of the lip, she set about the task of killing this passion by removing the object which occasioned it.

To drive a fellow-creature in the full spring-tide of his youth to the refuge of an asylum for idiots! To extinguish in him the power of loving and of hating! To make him little better than a senseless log, no better than a brute! To crush his budding energies for ever, and doom him to an existence of meaningless mouthing and idiotic jabber! To silence that tongue which might have electrified the world, delighted the populace, and edified the senate! To put clogging manacles upon those hands which might, in the course of unrevealed events, have grasped a sceptre, and

swayed the destinies of an empire ! To fetter the mind, to kill the soul, to paralyse the brain of a young, noble, generous, and open-hearted man ! Great heaven ! can crime go farther, can villany extend its limits ? Can the power of the evil one on earth be more fully exemplified ?

And for what was Maurice Fenwick to be so severely punished ? For what heinous offence was this awfully terrible calamity to fall upon him ? What had he done to incur so severe a penalty ?

He had done what many another ardent young man has done before him : he had been presumptuous enough to fall in love with a pretty girl.

Ah ! but he had done more than that : he had interfered with and run counter to the designs of an unscrupulous and ambitious woman, who could not brook to be thwarted, and who had set her heart upon her daughter's contracting a marriage with a man of rank, of presumed wealth, and undeniable position.

There was no occasion for Mrs. Sandford Saville to go into the highways and byways to find guests, for all who were bidden did not fail to come.

Her drawing-rooms really presented a brilliant scene. Generals who had seen service, and whose faces were bronzed by hardship and exposure to the weather, came with their decorated breasts ; statesmen who had deserved well of their country, and whose names were familiar as household words, were distinguishable in the multitudes ; authors, artists, were present ; every class of the community, in fact, was represented.

When Felicia made her appearance, Maurice Fenwick pressed forward to meet her, and was

greeted with a kind smile. Felicia was very well dressed, and Maurice thought he had never seen her look so lovely.

‘How very charming you look to-night!’ he ventured to say.

‘Am I not always charming?’ she replied, with an arch look.

‘To me you are always incomparable, but to-night you appear to be transcendently beautiful.’

‘O, you must not talk like that! It is wrong. Some day perhaps things may be different.’

‘O, do not say perhaps!’ replied Maurice, in a tone of vexation. ‘They must be different—they shall—or—’

He checked himself, for Felicia was fixing her regards upon him, and appeared to be chiding him with her eyes for his boldness.

‘Pardon me!’ he exclaimed; ‘I am carried away by my feelings.’

At this apology she smiled graciously.

‘Some day!’ he repeated to himself; ‘some day! Would that the day so vaguely mentioned could be determined! I would give worlds if I only could predicate with certainty upon its arrival!’

Mrs. Sandford Saville had, with her lynx-like glance, noticed Felicia’s *tête-à-tête* with Maurice Fenwick, and she advanced to the young couple with that air of matronly dignity which she knew how to assume, and which sat so well upon her. Not a muscle of her face betrayed the slightest annoyance at the liberty, the undoubted liberty, which Maurice was taking in engaging the attention and society of the belle of the evening, in whose honour the ball was given.

She greeted him with affability, saying, 'How do you do, Mr. Fenwick? It is so kind of you to spare an hour or two from your pressing duties in the Tax Office to visit us! It is so seldom that we have the pleasure of seeing you, though we hear of you now and then from Mortimer. Why do you shun your friends so much? It is good for young men to go out a little and see the world. You must not become too much of a recluse.'

Maurice Fenwick blushed, and stammered something about 'being very kind, much obliged, and not liking to be intrusive.'

Poor Maurice! he knew very little of the world and its ways. He was easily gulled, easily duped. His eyes were only too ready to have dust thrown into them.

He thought that Mrs. Saville was in earnest, and that Felicia had been speaking to her, and occasioned a revulsion of feeling in his favour.

'If you have finished your conversation with Mr. Fenwick, Felicia,' continued her mother, 'I must run away with you, for Valentine Bridgeman is waiting for the first dance you promised him.'

'But, mamma—' said Felicia, knowing that she had not promised him anything of the sort, and that the first dance was the property of Maurice Fenwick, if her word was worth anything.

Mrs. Saville interrupted her, exclaiming,

'You need not apologise for keeping him waiting. He is very good-natured, and has the most forgiving spirit of any one I know. He is a dear good creature.'

She waved her hand as she spoke to the master of the ceremonies, and the master of the ceremonies

waved his bâton to the band, which immediately struck up the first bars of a waltz.

Maurice gazed after Felicia, and soon had the mortification of seeing her dancing with the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman.

He was excessively annoyed, and anathematised all ambitious match-making mammas. His only consolation was that she had promised to dance with him during some part of the evening, and he resolved that it should not be his fault if the contract was not fulfilled.

He had a long time to wait, however, until the wished-for opportunity arrived.

The small hours were gradually increasing, when Felicia, around whom he had been hovering like an unquiet spirit, beckoned to him. He approached with alacrity.

‘At last,’ she exclaimed, ‘I am your most obedient. I need not tell you how I have longed for the time to come; but mamma has been so very vigilant, and I have been compelled to dance with so many distinguished people, that I have not had the shadow of a chance of fulfilling my promise to you until now.’

‘I am only too happy that the opportunity should have arrived at all,’ replied Maurice, who forgot his disappointment in the delight of having at last been fortunate enough to secure a dance with the girl he loved beyond all others.

O, the rapture of that moment! Maurice had never been so happy in his life. The joyous strains of the music, the animated crowd, the invigorating exercise, and the kindly looks Felicia bestowed upon him, all combined to send him into the seventh heaven of delight.

If he could only make the lovely creature with whom he was dancing his own for ever, his ambition would be gratified—he would have nothing left to wish for.

All he wanted was to be permitted to worship and idolise her, to pass his whole existence in her service and in ministering to her happiness; to be the recipient of her thoughts, her guide and adviser; to utter words of love; to give her his name, and make her the mother of his children.

How quickly the time passed—how soon the dance was over!

Almost before he was aware of it, the last clash of the cymbals was heard, the last bray of the cornet, the last vibration of the harp.

Felicia hung upon his arm, flushed and panting. Her eyes sought his, and meeting his glance, fell back modestly. Again she raised their fringed curtains, and encountered the gaze of her mother, who smiled more graciously than was her wont, and said,

‘You must be tired, dear. Your exertions have been unparalleled—you have been indefatigable. Come into the conservatory. I have had quite a fairy-like bower fitted up there. It is quite private; no one knows anything about it. I am sure you will be charmed. It is all camellias and geraniums, and the great secret of all is that there is a pail full of iced champagne and some glasses, so that we shall be independent of everybody, and able to defy the refreshment department.’

Felicia looked first at her mother, then at Maurice. Mrs. Saville interpreted this glance correctly, for she continued,

‘Mr. Fenwick will no doubt kindly accompany

you. It is so nice to be alone with one's particular friends.'

Until this moment Maurice had never had the least inkling of the particular friendship to which Mrs. Saville alluded. Whenever he had ventured to call upon the Berkeley Square people they had treated him with coldness, if not with positive insult; and, although he was poor and of humble origin, he had the soul of a king, and was not slow to notice the way in which he was received.

What were slights, insults, and indignities to him, when compared with Felicia's love? If he could only gain that he cared for nothing; it made him oblivious of all else. And he had gained it! No one could deny that he was the favoured suitor. The only bar to his happiness consisted in the fact of Felicia's persistent refusal to marry him.

Why did she refuse? Why was she so persistent? That was a mystery which he could not solve. It was an insoluble problem, which he left to time to elucidate.

Of one thing he was satisfied—Felicia was not trifling with him. She was essentially a good girl, and would not have deceived him to save her life. She did love him, and she had told him so, and it was a comfort to him to know that his affection was reciprocated.

Mrs. Saville's retreat was constructed at the far end of a spacious conservatory, which was extensively ornamented with Chinese lanterns and variegated lamps. The scene was very pretty—tall camellias reared their heads on all sides, and dazzled the eye with the purity of their wax-like flowers. Cactuses, rich and glowing, stood side by side, with other tropical plants, whose almost

unpronounceable names would only puzzle the unflo-ricultural reader were they mentioned.

It is enough that the effect was striking.

Maurice, with Felicia hanging on his arm, followed Mrs. Saville to the Bower of Camellias. It was here—in this delightful place, away from the noise and turmoil of the ballroom—that the wicked woman intended to consummate her designs.

The bower had been expressly constructed for the purpose of enabling her to administer the deleterious drug to Maurice. She succeeded in reaching it without being followed by any one else, and sitting down upon a rustic seat under a canopy of flowers, she said :

‘Although this is your first appearance, Mr. Fenwick, at our festivities, you must not be shy and bashful. I am making you the favoured and the welcome guest, as you may perceive, and you ought to appreciate my kindness.’

‘I do appreciate it very much indeed, Mrs. Saville,’ replied Fenwick, who was enchanted with such treatment, which was so different from anything that the lady’s previous conduct had led him to expect or hope for.

‘If we do make a pet of you,’ added Mrs. Saville, ‘you must not object to being useful.’

‘Certainly not. What can I do?’

‘Look about you, and you will see an ice-pail.’

‘Yes.’

‘In it are some bottles of champagne. Take out one and open it. You shall be Ganymede for the occasion.’

‘Nothing would please me more,’ replied

Maurice, who discovered the ice-pail, drew from it a bottle of wine, cut the wire, drew the cork, and poured out a foaming glass for Mrs. Saville and another for Felicia; last of all he helped himself.

Before he had time to do more than put his lips to his own glass, Mrs. Saville said:

‘Another, Mr. Fenwick, if you please. Open another. Since you are so docile and obedient, we must not let you be idle.’

Felicia was quite pleased at her mother’s condescension, and looked up smilingly at Maurice. When Mrs. Saville saw that the attention of both was engaged, she drew the packet from her pocket that Alphonse Pastille had given her, and emptied its contents in the glass that Maurice had left for himself.

With such rapidity was this done that it passed unperceived. The next moment Maurice was holding a bottle of wine in his hand, from which the sparkling, foaming liquor was bubbling. Finding that the ladies’ glasses were full, he filled his own, and so in a manner signed his own death-warrant.

‘Now, now, Mr. Fenwick, drink before the effervescence subsides!’ cried Mrs. Saville, who could scarcely disguise her impatience.

In an evil moment he did so, and being thirsty, drained the glass to the dregs.

A tremor convulsed his frame, his teeth chattered, and he said:

‘How cold! It was like drinking so much ice!’

‘And is that a fault in summer, when the rooms are hot and dancing has made us thirsty?’

‘No. O, no!’ he replied.

Mrs. Saville had not been told by Pastille how long the drug would be in its working. She was rather curious to know whether Maurice would at once lose his senses and become an idiot, or whether the drug was of slow action and did its work gradually.

She watched the young man narrowly, and was able to perceive a sudden pallor stealing over his cheeks, at times his lips quivered and he shut his eyes as if his vision was startled by something dreadful, which he wished to keep out.

Her purpose was accomplished; and as she had other things to attend to, she proposed that they should return to the ballroom. The proposal was at once agreed to. As she rose, she dexterously contrived to knock the glass Fenwick had been drinking from off the table. It was broken into several small pieces. This was a clever contrivance, for if any one took up the glass, it would not be easy to detect the presence of the deadly drug which it had so lately contained.

‘At last my triumph is complete,’ she said to herself, while her eyes flashed in a self-congratulatory manner. ‘Now it will be impossible for Felicia to play the part of the headstrong and disobedient daughter. I have by my caution, my prudence, my foresight, given a terrible blow to any thoughts of a runaway match. I have rendered such a contingency impossible. That poor fellow will, in a short time, be a drivelling idiot, and Felicia will turn from him with loathing, and be only too glad to bury his memory in a new love for Valentine Bridgeman.’

Maurice Fenwick took Felicia back to the ball-

room, but he soon had to resign her to some one whom she had promised to dance with.

He did not care about dancing with any one else. To his pure and unsophisticated mind it would have been an act of treason to his love. He contented himself with leaning against the wall and watching her as, sylph-like, she whirled round the room in the firm grasp of a moustached captain in the Guards.

An hour passed.

At the end of that time Maurice Fenwick's face, which had been gradually losing that characteristic expression which was the most noticeable feature about him, became positively vacant. Had he been asleep or a corpse all cold and rigid laid out for interment, the painful vacancy could not have been more complete.

Occasionally a spasm crossed his countenance, and he clenched his fists as if trying to arrest in their progress his vagrant thoughts, which, flitting quickly, seemed to be leaving him one by one.

He appeared to be conscious of this gradual desertion, and to be at a loss to discover the cause of it.

A look of exquisite annoyance took possession of his face, hung there a moment, and then faded as it came, having traced there for the time being a tablet of unutterable thoughts.

O! it was awful to witness the wreck of mind that was taking place within the young man. The subtle essences of which he was the victim were doing their work with strange, with marvellous speed.

They steeped all his faculties in oblivion, laid a heavy weight upon them, choked them up,

placed a seal upon them, and signed the fell decree for mental chaos. The night of reason was approaching. Black night, Cimmerian gloom, perhaps everlasting glamour.

Mortimer Saville had been in the card-room. He had played *écarté* with a young cornet of his acquaintance, who had more money than discretion, and won a large sum, which he put in his pocket with a sigh of relief, thinking that it would be highly acceptable in the morning to stop the insatiable maw of a creditor who lent money at a hundred and twenty per cent on accommodation bills, a species of security he much delighted in.

Maurice Fenwick, leaning against the wall in a purposeless manner, with his lack-lustre eyes, his pallid cheeks, his listless air, at once arrested his attention.

He stopped, exclaiming as he did so :

‘What! Maurice, my boy, doing the wall-flower business so early in the evening? Have you exhausted the list of all the pretty girls already? Come. Wake up, and I will see what I can do for you in the way of introduction.’

An imbecile chuckle was the only response that came from Maurice Fenwick’s lips. He stared stupidly at the speaker, who could only come to the conclusion that he was intoxicated.

‘I *am* surprised,’ muttered Mortimer. ‘For I never saw Fenwick tipsy before.’

CHAPTER XXI.

UP IN THE WORLD.

MONKEY MARVEL opened the door of the cupboard with a steady hand. He had no cause for fear; there was nothing to make his hand shaky. If the poor dumb girl was dead, he was not responsible for her fate. He, at least, had not incarcerated her, and gone away, got tipsy, and left her to perish of starvation.

When the door swung back, he held up the candle, whose sickly glare fell upon the upturned features of Mula. She was lying on her back, in the embrace of death; her face was pinched, her cheeks hollow and sunken.

It was easy to see that she had died an awful death.

She would have given worlds for one drop of water to quench the terrible thirst which had consumed her. It was enough to disturb Luke Fentyman's serenity. The boy sprang back. The spectacle was new to him, and he was afraid.

'Is the gal dead, my lad?' queried Luke.

He knew that the reply would be in the affirmative, but he hoped against hope that it might not.

'Yes, she's dead enough!' replied Monkey Marvel.

'Stoop down and feel her. How do you know she's dead?'

'Not me!' cried Marvel, recoiling in disgust at the bare idea.

'I must do it myself, eh?' continued Luke Fentyman. 'You're not much good, I think.'

He advanced to the cupboard, took the light from the trembling hands of the boy, and, falling on his knees, proceeded to examine the body of the girl, in order to satisfy himself beyond a doubt that her soul had parted from her body.

There was no question that Mula was dead.

When the man had overcome the first dash of repugnance he had felt at the effect of which he was the cause without intending it, the natural coarseness of his nature asserted itself. Not one word of pity or commiseration escaped his lips. He was annoyed at the catastrophe, for he had by his blundering folly killed the girl who was possessed of the clue to the identity of the gentleman he had watched.

She knew his secret.

Of that he felt certain, and if she had lived he might have had recourse to a thousand arts and devices in order to extract the secret from her; but now that she was dead, she was of no more use to him.

The panels of the cupboard-door were scratched and stained, showing that if she could not call out for assistance, she had done the next best thing—she had endeavoured, by making a great clattering, to arrest somebody's attention; but in this effort she had not succeeded.

And why?

The house had been nearly deserted. Michael Saville had been arrested, with his confederates, on the very day when her imprisonment began, and as she lived a strictly private and solitary life, no one wondered at not seeing her, and no one paid her a visit.

There was a great gulf between her and the

other inhabitants of the Pantiles, for whom, in conjunction with her late mistress, she entertained a profound aversion.

‘We must go, my lad,’ said Luke Fentyman. ‘It’s no good our stopping here. Perhaps some one who knows us may be popping upon us just when we don’t want it.’

‘What’s to be done with the body?’ inquired Monkey Marvel.

‘Ah! there you are again. What’s to be done with it? I wish she hadn’t died. It’s confounded provoking, ’cos she knew the secret I’m fishing for, and was bound to let out to me. She must ha’ gone and died out o’ spite; it ain’t nothin’ else. Suppose we have a flare up and burn the place down.’

‘Isn’t it too risky, all in broad daylight too?’

‘That don’t matter; we shall be away and round the corner hours afore the people finds it out. I’ve often felt I should like to burn down some parts of London. I mean those sickly-looking parts, all dirt and smoke and rats and bad air, where the rich drive the poor to starve and catch fevers and die. If Drury Lane and all its courts was burnt to the ground, they couldn’t build ’em up as they was afore, could they? No. Very well, then; it would be doing the poor good, for they would have new and better houses to live in.’

This was commonplace philosophy placed upon a false basis, but not utterly devoid of truth.

The man’s eyes flashed with a determined light as he continued: ‘Clear out! I’m bound to do it, if I gets hanged at Newgate for it. Clear out! It’ll be something like a bonfire!’

He held the candle, as he spoke, to the dry joists and supports of the cupboard, but they did not kindle fast enough to please him. Seeing a heap of newspapers in one corner, with a few bundles of firewood, he set light to them, and soon a bright blaze threatened to wrap the whole house in flames before many minutes had elapsed.

‘This way, follow me up the stairs,’ said Luke Fentyman.

Monkey Marvel needed no bidding; he was alarmed at the hardihood of Fentyman, and terrified lest the police, of whom he always stood in great dread, should pounce upon and drag them off to prison, which was a place of involuntary abode of which he had the greatest horror; for, young as he was, a considerable portion of his life had been passed within the walls of a gaol.

Luke Fentyman was futile in expedients, and a man of resources when hard pressed; but it must be confessed that he was somewhat taken aback when he saw a policeman standing at the corner of the court.

Fortunately his back was towards the incendiaries, and they contrived to reach the street before he noticed them.

Of course he recognised them both. He had been some time in the force, and the faces of most thieves, young and old, were known to him.

He put some questions to them, which Fentyman answered in an impudent manner.

‘I daresay you’ve been making some work for me,’ said the officer. ‘If you have I’m glad of it, for I think it’s a’most time you were caged again. You’ve had a pretty long spell of it since you last saw the inside of Pentonville.’

‘And I like it so well that I mean to make it longer,’ replied Luke.

He took hold of Monkey Marvel’s arm, and drew him along the street with great quickness.

‘The cat will be out of the bag almost directly,’ he said in a hurried whisper; ‘and we must make ourselves scarce, or the town will be too hot to hold us. I want to see the fire. It is sure to be a stunning one; but if we stayed near we should be collared. I am sorry that the constable saw us, for we shall have to lay dark or go into the country. What do you say? Will you go on a tramp with me?’

‘I don’t mind. We can exhibit, if you like. I can do the Marvel dodges—tumbling, and cater-wheeling, and all that.’

The Duke of York’s Column at the end of Waterloo Place struck Luke Fentyman as he was looking up, and he conceived the idea of ascending it, and watching the conflagration from that lofty spot. He had an idea that anybody might go up the shaft by payment of a few halfpence—nor was he mistaken.

On reaching the column, he paid fourpence for himself and the same for the lad, and they were admitted.

On reaching the summit they looked through the iron railings, and had a magnificent view of the best part of London. The sun had completely asserted his sway over the nocturnal mists, and was bathing house-tops and pavement in a golden flood. The sky was of an Italian blue, the air fresh, clear, and rarefied. But there was one speck on the horizon, one dim and gradually increasing cloud. It arose in a densely populated

neighbourhood. It had the appearance of a thick cloud of smoke, a murky column of vapour spirally ascending. After a time thin flashes of flame darted up, licking the sky. Then hoarse shouts arose and loud cries. There was a visible commotion in the neighbourhood of Old Drury.

It was clear that a fire had broken out—a fire of magnitude.

Engines left their stations and were drawn along the streets with all the rapidity that well-fed horses could convey them.

It was some time, however, before the hose could be got to work—and the larger part of the Pantiles was in flames.

Luke Fentyman watched his handiwork with a ferocious glee; he smiled maniacally, and gloated over the awful scene, never thinking of the unspeakable misery he was causing scores of his fellow-creatures, who were driven out of their houses with such suddenness as to be unable to save their furniture from the general wreck and ruin which was taking place.

It was a terrible fire. Long rows of dark-coated police kept back the frantic spectators; the brave firemen exerted themselves to the utmost; but the flames were difficult to get at or extinguish.

The constable who had seen Luke Fentyman at the corner of the Pantiles was not quite satisfied in his own mind that some robbery or deed of violence had not been committed.

He was far from suspecting what had befallen Mula, the dumb girl; but with a sagacity peculiarly his own, he thought it his duty to follow Luke and see where he went.

It is by this system of watching and spying the suspicious characters that the police are often enabled to make some of their cleverest and most astounding captures.

The constable's name was Lodstock.

He saw Luke Fentyman go into the Duke of York's Column, and he waited outside to watch the course of events.

Half an hour elapsed, and his birds did not come down. Still he waited and watched carefully. Soon after that, some people went past on their way to the park, talking about the awful fire.

Lodstock listened attentively to all that fell from their lips, and gathered from the random conversation of which he was the auditor that the fire had a short time before broken out in a court near Drury Lane called the Pantiles.

He put this and that together and came to the inevitable conclusion that Fentyman was in some way concerned in the fire, and knew more about its origin than any one else, and he thought it his duty to take him in custody on suspicion.

Of how far he was right or wrong the reader is capable of judging.

He entered the column, went up the steps, and succeeded in reaching Luke Fentyman before that worthy had the least idea of what was about to happen.

A gentle touch on the shoulder caused him to turn round, bringing him face to face with the officer. He started back, not knowing how to act. There might be more officers behind. It was impossible for him to say.

'What do you want with me?' he cried.

'It burns nicely,' replied Lodstock sarcastically.

‘What burns?’

‘The fire.’

‘Well, what of it?’

‘It’s in the Pantiles. Never heard of the Pantiles, did you? No. I thought not. You weren’t there this morning, about an hour and a half ago? I suppose I didn’t see you?’

‘You saw me all right,’ said Luke Fentyman, recovering his courage, ‘but what of that?’

‘Only this: you’re wanted.’

‘What for? I never set the house a-fire.’

‘I don’t say you did. I’ve other things besides that to buff to you. But come. I want you.’

Luke sullenly acquiesced in this request, saying:

‘I’ll come quiet enough. You needn’t put no darbies on.’

The police-constable had been rattling some irons in his pocket, but he refrained from putting them on his prisoner’s wrists, which was an act of charity he had cause to bitterly repent of shortly afterwards. Luke gave Monkey Marvel a look which he knew how to interpret, and the youngster kept close to the officer’s heels.

The shaft of the column was very dark in places. Luke had noted this fact as he came up, and now made use of his knowledge.

When he reached the middle of the shaft he commenced an assault upon Lodstock, for which the man was not prepared.

A furious struggle took place between them.

The ruffian saw his opportunity, and he hurled the constable down the long flight of steps. This caused him to fall some length, but as the staircase was spiral, he did not fall the entire distance.

His head struck the stone wall, and he lay stunned and bleeding.

Footsteps were heard approaching. Some one was evidently coming up.

Fentyman commenced the descent, passed the policeman's body, and gained the entrance, through which he emerged into the open air.

He went up Regent Street with his mind in a whirl, not knowing what to do, and cudgelling his brains for an idea. He had, as it were, only escaped the perils of arrest and prosecution by the skin of his teeth, by a hair's-breadth, by a miracle.

They gained the Edgware Road and went into a small public-house to rest themselves, and here they arranged their plan of action.

They were to go on the tramp to Birmingham and Liverpool. Luke could play on a penny flute and sing some popular songs. Monkey Marvel could exercise his agility upon a pole, a rope, or even the bare road or the stone-paved street. He was to be the gymnast, Luke the musician.

By this they confidently hoped to gain a living. They walked fifteen miles that day, gained a small village, went through a rehearsal of their performance to a crowd of admiring country people, were rewarded with some cheers and fewer halfpence, and finally made an arrangement with the landlord of a public-house, whereby they undertook to give their entertainment in the tap-room four successive times during the evening, in return for which he would give them unlimited ale, some bread-and-cheese, a bed, and a trifle of breakfast.

With this offer they gladly closed. For some time they had to exert themselves, and were curiously listened to by all the villagers.

The landlord complimented them on their skill and cleverness, and said, 'Why don't you visit gentlemen's houses?'

'Are there many about here?'

'O yes. There's Mr. Vivian—he hasn't got a town house, because he lives so near London. You know it is only fifteen miles, which is nothing for a carriage and pair of horses. He'd be glad, I daresay, to let the servants have you in the hall, and I do hear he's got some great folks staying with him—lords and ladies, and all that.'

'Indeed! we'll look up, then, in the morning; and thank you for the hint,' replied Fentyman.

Mr. Vivian was a gentleman of large property, living hard by; and Luke, accompanied by Monkey Marvel, walked to the house in the morning. They walked to the front of the house, and had the impudence to commence their performance in front of the window of a room in which Mr. Vivian and his friends were breakfasting.

The guests crowded to the window to see what the nature of the exhibition might be.

Luke was balancing, or, more strictly speaking, allowing Monkey Marvel to balance himself upon his head, when he happened to look up at the window.

His eye fell upon a gentleman's face. He became agitated, his knees bent, and he lost that rigidity of muscle which was necessary for Monkey Marvel's perfect equilibrium.

The consequence was that the little fellow fell down, reaching the earth with a crash.

There was a loud cry, partly of pain, partly of terror. The guests rushed on to the lawn to render what assistance they could.

Luke Fentyman smiled sardonically, for he had recognised the never-to-be-forgotten face of Lord Linstock.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW.

It was soon evident to all that the unfortunate lad who had been disporting himself for the amusement of those who were now sympathising with him in his distress was much hurt. His antics and gambols were over, for a time at least.

Deep groans arose at intervals. Sharp cries of pain were wrung from the boy by the severity of the suffering he was undergoing.

His wrath seemed to be concentrated entirely upon Luke Fentyman, who certainly was the cause of a lamentable accident, which a little care and foresight would have prevented.

Lord Linstock was the first to go to the lad's assistance; he was followed by a surgeon who happened to be among the guests.

'What is the matter with you?' said his lordship. 'Are you much hurt?'

'It's all him,' replied Monkey Marvel, in a lugubrious tone, pointing to Luke, while his eyes flashed with a savage vindictiveness. 'It's all him! He done it a purpose!'

'What motive could he have had for so doing? Come, come, be generous; you must be mistaken,' said Lord Linstock, while the surgeon was pursuing his examination of the boy's body.

'Not I, master,' said Monkey Marvel. 'There's no mistake, I'll take my—'

‘No, no! Don’t take any oaths—don’t swear. Not right, not at all right!’ interrupted his lordship.

‘If you’ll believe me without, why I won’t take no oaths,’ replied Monkey Marvel, with that strange employment of two negatives which is a characteristic of the speech of the half-educated. ‘But if you was in so much pain, or half as much, you wouldn’t stand nice over the language you used. I say he done it a purpose, and I can prove as he done it.’

‘Why, my poor fellow? Tell me why? If you prove that he did it with malice prepense, I will have him arrested and put on his trial.’

‘I don’t want none o’ your poor-fellowing!’ cried Monkey Marvel. ‘I’ve always got my livin’ without begging or asking *you* for so much as a crumb of bread, so you may keep your pity. If I’ve broke any of my limbs, I suppose the work-house will keep me. If not, p’raps there’s a ’orspital ’andy.’

Luke Fentyman did not endeavour to restrain Monkey Marvel from making any revelation respecting him. It is a question whether he listened to him, so intently were his eyes riveted upon Lord Linstock, and so eagerly did he watch his every movement.

‘You gentlefolks,’ continued Monkey Marvel, ‘have robbed the poor of almost everything, but you can’t rob ’em of unions and ’orspitals—that beats you, that does.’

This remark was a singular instance of the perversion common among a certain class of the poor. They consider themselves wronged in every possible way by those who are better off than

themselves. The very possession of riches is a crime and an offence.

The lad forgot that if it had not been for the people he was denouncing the poor-houses and the hospitals would never have been built, and would not exist.

The doctor made his examination, necessarily in a cursory manner; but he was able to discover that the lad had met with a serious accident.

Rising from the ground upon which he had hitherto been kneeling, he exclaimed,

‘Compound fracture—right leg. Broken in three places.’

The gentleman to whom the house belonged came forward and said,

‘I shall be glad to place a room at the boy’s disposal until his hurt can be looked to and the leg set.’

The doctor replied that he had all the necessary implements with him, and that he would—if the lad were carried in—at once do all in his power for his recovery.

‘I ain’t a-going to be took nowhere,’ exclaimed Monkey Marvel, whose face was pale, and whose voice was much fainter than usual, ‘until I’ve had my say about Luke. He ain’t behaved well to me. I can see through his plant now. He tried to break my neck, but he didn’t do it, and he’s that wild he’s fit to go and hang hisself. Look how he starts and trembles!’

All eyes were turned upon Luke Fentyman, who certainly was excited, but his excitement arose from a very different cause to what Monkey Marvel attributed it.

When he found himself the observed of all

observers, he removed his steadfast gaze from Lord Linstock, and confronted those who were beginning to look upon him as a malefactor of the deepest dye.

‘He’s a bad man, gen’elmen all,’ continued Monkey Marvel. ‘He’d rob a church, and—I feel so weak I can’t speak now. I feel as if I must go to sleep. All is dizzy and going round, and the stars seem to come down and flash in my eyes. But send to London and ask the police.’

The last part of his speech was uttered in so low a tone that his words were almost inarticulate, which was lucky for Luke, who thus escaped the indignation which would otherwise have been lavished upon him.

That it was only a thieves’ quarrel was the opinion of most of the spectators. No specific charge had been made, so that no decided action could be taken against Luke, who was told that his companion would be taken care of, and then peremptorily ordered off the grounds with a warning that if found there again he would be prosecuted for trespassing with a felonious intent.

Luke said nothing in reply to this, but went up to Lord Linstock, who was standing beneath a cedar-tree, and unperceived slipped a piece of paper into his hands, upon which he had scrawled with a pencil these words :

‘A friend of Patience Pomfret, who died in the Pantiles, wishes to speak a few minutes with you in private.’

Lord Linstock read the paper with great surprise, and looked at Luke without recognising him.

A friend of Linstock’s, who was standing by,

thinking that Fentyman wished to impose upon him, exclaimed,

‘Don’t give him anything, Linstock. Don’t let him have the value of a sou. I have no doubt he is an impostor, and not worthy of encouragement.’

‘He has merely asked my advice upon a trifling matter,’ replied Lord Linstock, ‘and I cannot very well refuse him.’

‘H’m,’ said the gentleman, with a shrug of the shoulders, ‘philanthropy and a love of one’s species certainly make one eccentric.’

‘Come with me!’ exclaimed his lordship to Luke. Luke followed respectfully at his lordship’s heels, very much after the manner of a spaniel or a terrier, until they were both out of view of the house. On each side of them was a lawn, dotted here and there with shrubs of various sorts and sizes, and ornamented with flower-beds at the extreme margin; behind them was a belt of trees; before them was a flight of steps, which led to another and more spacious garden, entirely devoted to the cultivation of flowers.

Statues, urns, and basins for the reception of geraniums, cacti, mignonette, and similar ornaments, were placed at convenient distances, and altogether the effect was simple, yet beautiful and striking.

Lord Linstock took up a position on the top of the steps, and leaning against the stone balustrade, fixed his eyes upon Luke, and exclaimed,

‘Now, my man, let’s hear what you have to say. We are away from the crowd, and stand in no danger of being spied upon. How did you become acquainted with the Pantiles?’

Luke Fentyman found it difficult to determine upon his course of action. He thought that his best way would be to take his lordship by storm. He did not as yet know who he was. He was in ignorance as to whether he was peer or commoner, gentle or simple; so he said,

‘I saw Patience before she died, and she made a communication to me which concerns you.’

‘What did she say?’ demanded Lord Linstock quickly.

‘She said that she considered herself injured and aggrieved by you, and that I was to follow you up and make your life miserable by continually threatening to let the world know the nature of the relations that existed between you.’

It will be seen that Luke had polished up his best English, and that he made use of the longest and most polite words he could find in his vocabulary.

‘Well, my man, what can you let the world know?’ said Lord Linstock, without moving a muscle of his face.

‘I’m not going to show my cards to you,’ replied Luke, fencing with the question. ‘What I want to say is this: you give me a reasonable inducement, and I’ll hold my tongue, and no one shall ever hear a word of the secret.’

‘What do you want?’ abruptly demanded his lordship.

‘Well, I’m a poor chap, and if I could get a couple of hundred, I might start in business. Then I want something for present expenses, and something to pay my debts. Put it all together and lump it, and let us say five hundred pounds.’

‘Five hundred, eh?’

‘Yes, that’s the figure, and it’s moderate under the circumstances.’

‘If you were to receive that you would undertake never to come again and trouble me with your applications?’

‘O, I’d swear!’ replied Luke eagerly.

‘I daresay you would,’ replied Lord Linstock, with a sarcastic smile. ‘But I do not intend to trouble you. I do not believe you know anything, and I most decidedly refuse to give you a single halfpenny.’

Luke was astounded at this reply, which was so totally different from what he expected.

He flattered himself that everything was going on smoothly, that Linstock was a gentleman easily terrified into acquiescence, and that the next thing he would do would be to take a book from his pocket, unfasten it, and draw therefrom a small roll of notes payable at the Bank of England, which was to be the reward of his secrecy. That is, his keeping an imaginary secret, or preserving inviolate one with which he had no acquaintance whatever, not even the most remote.

A sudden idea took possession of him when he found himself foiled.

‘If I cannot get money out of this swell,’ he said to himself, ‘by the means which I proposed to myself, I will knock him down, rob him of his watch and chain, and whatever else there may be about him, decamp with that, find out in the village who he is, and afterwards come upon him with more knowledge than I possess at present.’

To conceive was to act with Luke, who sprang forward, and without saying a word, dashed his clenched fist in Lord Linstock’s face, causing him

to lose his balance and fall headlong, with a wild despairing cry, down the long flight of steps which led into the flower-garden below.

He fell into a parterre of roses, which, bending beneath the superimposed weight, were bowed down, crushed, and mangled to the earth.

Fentyman sprang forward, and with the utmost rapidity rifled the pockets of the prostrate peer, appropriating his watch and chain and a considerable sum in ready money, besides two rings of some value.

Having secured this booty about his person, he reascended the steps, only to find himself face to face with some gentlemen who had heard the scream emitted by Lord Linstock as he fell.

‘What’s the matter?’ exclaimed one.

‘Gentleman fell down and hurt himself, sir, and has sent me for the doctor,’ replied Luke.

On receiving this clever and opportune reply, the new-comers were apparently satisfied, for they allowed Luke to pursue his headlong career unmolested. He did not neglect his opportunity. Instead of going to the house for the assistance of the doctor, as he had said, he went across the lawn, jumped a sunk fence, and ran along the park with all the speed of which he was capable. Nor did he rest until he was out of sight.

The gentlemen who went to Lord Linstock’s assistance found him so severely injured as to be incapable of speech.

It seemed as if the spine was hurt in some way. He breathed heavily and blood stood upon his lips, which spoke of internal injury.

They took him up, and carried him to the house amongst them.

Lady Linstock met them upon the steps. She was attired in her riding-habit. She was going out for a ride.

‘Whom have you there?’ she exclaimed.

Suddenly her eye fell upon her husband’s features. A dizzy feeling took possession of her. A despairing wail broke from her lips, and she fell back upon the hard, cold stones as insensible as the quarried blocks upon which she was lying.

Lord Linstock was taken to his bedroom, and the best medical assistance was telegraphed for from London.

The unfortunate gentleman did not open his eyes nor show any symptoms of recovery.

His friends were alarmed about him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH-BED CONFESSION.

SOME hours later in that memorable but melancholy day a sorrowful group was gathered around the bedside of the once gay, energetic, and fashionable Lord Linstock—now, alas, how changed, how altered!

There was no wasting away there, no gradual sinking of the human frame until the unhappy patient is but the shadow of his former self. If this and other mournful accessories were wanting, one quite as dreadful was present at what was the death-bed of Lord Linstock.

His breathing was laboured, his cheeks pale and fevered, as was his whole frame.

The thread of his life had snapped, and yet he looked a lusty man. The broken ends met so well together that, to look at him, it was hard to tell they were broken.

Yet the dread decree had gone forth. Men of standing and experience had met together, and solemnly declared that the noble lord could not outlive the night.

His wife had heard the news and was well-nigh distracted thereat. It was a heavy blow to her. Of course death is always a sad and a terrible thing, but when one we love and who is endeared to us is suddenly taken away, it is doubly, trebly more sad and terrible than when the insatiable destroyer has crept slowly on towards his bourne, not coming upon us unawares, but showing us his hideous front, and making us familiar with his repulsive countenance.

The dying peer was fully aware of his fate; the last rites of the Church, of which he had always been an influential and an ardent supporter, had been administered to him at his own request.

The doctor had told him that he had sustained an injury of the spine, and that he had also shattered his body internally, so that death must be the inevitable result of the calamitous occurrence.

A lawyer had been summoned from the adjacent town, who had drawn up a will. Lord Linstock did not die insolvent, but his property was dreadfully mortgaged—so much so that had he not held the various offices and emoluments in the City that were his, and which had been acceded him by virtue of his position and his historic name, he could not have lived at Hadlow Castle as he had done.

He left all that he had to leave to his wife. The encumbered estates went, of course, to the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman, his only son, who might redeem them by a marriage with a wealthy young lady; but that he would do so by any personal industry or exertion of his own was extremely problematical.

When every formality had been gone through, Lord Linstock begged those who were in the room, with the exception of his wife, to go away.

This request was at once complied with.

His lordship was lying on a spacious Arabian bedstead, surrounded with that heavy and gorgeous furniture which is sometimes to be met with in country houses.

Her ladyship sat upon a high-backed chair, with her handkerchief to her eyes, scarcely able, by the exercise of great effort, to control her emotion and check her sobs.

When husband and wife were alone, and not a soul was near to interrupt them, Lord Linstock, who was raised up in bed by the aid of pillows, said,

‘Leave off crying, my dear, if you can, and come near to me. My voice is faint and low, and I am afraid you may not hear me distinctly.’

‘O! I cannot! I cannot!’ replied her ladyship. ‘It is so awful, so shocking! I *must* give way, or I shall choke myself. I did my best to restrain my grief while those people were present, but if I don’t cry I shall go mad!’

The unhappy lady received no answer, and she burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears. When she had recovered from this paroxysm she approached the bed in obedience to her husband’s commands, saying:

‘Now I am calmer. Now speak to me. Let me listen to you. If I am too much overcome to reply, you will know to what to attribute my silence.’

‘I want to make you acquainted with a chapter in the history of my life with which you have up to the present time been in ignorance,’ exclaimed Lord Linstock. ‘The ways of Providence are indeed inscrutable. I had hoped to live many years yet, to see the estates unencumbered and—but no matter. It was a dream which the Almighty did not will should be realised. It is all over now, and all I have to do—all that is left me—is to unburden my mind to you, so that I may not die with the heavy weight of a long-kept secret on my soul. I have wronged you—’

‘Me!’ exclaimed Lady Linstock, forgetting her grief in her new-born curiosity.

‘Yes, deeply but unintentionally; and yet I wronged another more. It must be in your recollection that when we were first married we had not much affection for one another. Ours was the sort of union then, as now, in vogue. I will not go so far as to say that we had no kindred spirits and congenial dispositions, but what I will content myself with saying is, that we were not suited to one another, and that we lived an unhappy life.’

‘That’s true enough,’ said her ladyship, ‘but since then we have atoned for the past. Your goodness to me taught me to love you.’

‘I am willing to admit that, but, harsh as it may sound, I never loved you—never loved you as a husband should love his wife and the mother of his child.’

‘Did your coldness arise from any fault of mine?’

‘No. It was the fault of those who made us husband and wife, because it pleased them to do so.’

‘Did you love another?’

‘Always. We corresponded secretly—I without your knowledge, she without the consent of her friends.’

This declaration so enraged Lady Linstock that, oblivious of all but her personal pique and resentment, she exclaimed, in a deeply tragic voice :

‘I hope I may be forgiven for wishing that heaven will curse her.’

‘Heaven has blessed her,’ replied Lord Linstock. ‘Heaven, more merciful than yourself, has thought fit to reward her sufferings on earth by translating her to a brighter sphere.’

‘She is dead, then?’

‘She is. Not many weeks have elapsed since her death. Do you recollect when you were so ill that the doctors gave you up, and said you could not live as long as I have to remain in the world?’

‘Yes, perfectly.’

‘I stayed by your bedside until you were pronounced insensible and incapable of recovery. Then I went to London on pretence of obtaining better medical advice, and—’

‘What?’ eagerly demanded Lady Linstock.

‘Water! give me some water!’ said her husband.

Rising, she went to a sideboard and poured out some water in which a stimulant had been placed by the doctor in case the dying man should require something to drink.

He drank it greedily and proceeded with his confession, for it can be called nothing else.

‘In London I met Patience—Patience Pomfret—who had received a telegraphic message from me.’

‘Patience Pomfret!’ exclaimed Lady Lisntock, in surprise. ‘Do you mean the Westernshire Pomfrets?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did not one of the daughters run away and disappear, never again being heard of?’

‘Yes, you are quite right.’

‘Ah! I see it—I see it all now,’ cried Lady Linstock, covering her face with her hands. ‘You were false—you were—’

‘Hear me out. I have not long to live,’ said her husband, in a sepulchral voice. ‘I shall not detain you a great while; but something within me impels me to tell you all. I must not withhold one iota from you. When Patience met me, she had left her home without the knowledge or consent of her friends or her people. We had long been lovers, and when I married you, she swore most solemnly that she would remain single unless Providence thought fit to release me from my matrimonial fetters. I told her that you were dead. This fiction I improvised, because at the moment I thought you could never recover, and that before the morning I should hear of your death. It required some solicitation on my part to induce Patience to listen to my entreaties for a hasty marriage; but at last she consented, and the next day we were privately married. We had no sooner arrived at our hotel on our way back from the church—’

‘O, this is too dreadful!’ said Lady Linstock. ‘I would rather—much rather—that you had died with the secret unrevealed, than that you should have made me miserable for—for life.’

‘It is better that you should know it, and as I have commenced, I will go on. Well, when we reached the hotel, instead of finding a telegram saying that you were dead, I received one telling me that you had rallied in the night, and were expected to recover.’

‘It was the judgment of God.’

‘As such I accepted it, and bowed my head. At once I revealed everything to Miss Pomfret, who was just congratulating herself upon being Lady Linstock. I was a bigamist, and the fact would have speedily become known if it had not been for her magnanimity.’

There was a pause, during which he demanded more water, with which he was supplied. It is doubtful whether he could have lived to complete his tale, unless the stimulant contained in the water had sustained and kept him up.

‘O, Celestine, Celestine,’ he added, addressing his weeping wife, ‘forgive and pity a most unhappy and miserable woman. Forgive her for that she was wretched in her love, though constant, beyond all others, and because she never once wronged you in thought or deed. Her love for virtue was exemplary. Pity her because she died away from all but me, who loved and honoured her.’

‘Were you at her funeral?’ inquired Lady Linstock, who, as all these revelations were crowding upon her, was gradually assuming a stony demeanour.

Her pride was hurt, and she could not bear that—anything but that.

It was true that when they were first married they wasted no love upon one another, but she had ever been scrupulously faithful in thought to her marriage vow; and to be told, at the last moment, that her husband, whom she had always respected as constant, if not ardent and demonstrative, had been a truant to his vow, was more than she could tolerate.

‘I was; and more than that, I saw her die—but you anticipate me. Patience would not receive a farthing from me. She acquitted me of all blame, and said that though the struggle would break her heart in time, she would live away from every one, burying herself in the heart of the great city, and gaining her livelihood by her own exertions. All my protestations against the adoption of this plan were useless. She was determined, and she would listen to nothing. I afterwards heard that she became a needlewoman in the house of a fashionable milliner, from whom she received the means of earning a bare subsistence.’

Again he paused to collect his thoughts ere he could resume his narrative.

‘She wrote to me before her death, and I visited her. She expired while I was in the house. I buried her, and followed the coffin to the grave—’

‘Pray make an end of your story, and talk to me of something else,’ said Lady Linstock. ‘I cannot bear to hear you sing the praises of one who, whatever her merits or demerits, undoubtedly was my rival.’

‘A few words more. Bear with me a little

longer,' said Lord Linstock, in a pleading tone of entreaty.

In his then state, she had not the will nor the inclination to refuse him.

'A man overheard Patience Pomfret's last words, and although he could not catch their meaning, he came to the conclusion that there was something secret and hidden between us, for keeping which inviolate he would be well paid. But I had not rid myself of him, although I flattered myself that I had. He met me again.'

'When?'

'This morning; and by attacking me suddenly, on my refusing to supply him with money, caused those injuries from which I am now suffering, and which I am told will result in my death. Now you know everything. The offence of which I was guilty has brought its own punishment. The dissipation which I plunged into on our marriage was occasioned by my guardian compelling me to marry you, my dear, when I loved another. It is altogether the old story of a *mariage de convenance*. Patience was my victim, but heaven knows I neither intended wrong to you nor her. If you feel that you have anything to forgive, forgive me. If, on the other hand, your conscience acquits me, give me your blessing.'

Lady Linstock sat still for some time.

She clasped her hands over her knees, and rocked herself to and fro.

She was not a young woman. Age had set its mark upon her, and her face was wrinkled, if not careworn.

Its lines were drawn down; and when her mind was absorbed, as it then was, the expression of her

face was anything but agreeable to regard. It was cold, hard, stern.

A terrible conflict was going on in her mind.

Should she forgive her erring husband, or should she allow him to sink into the grave unblessed?

The demon was at her elbow, whispering many things to her. Amongst other things, he said, in a sibilant whisper,

‘Forgive him! Why should you? Did he think of you when you were thought to be on your death-bed? Had he any compassion for you? Hardly had your eyes closed, when he was on his way to meet your rival, who has ever held a stronger place in his affections than yourself. When his eyes have been looking into yours with simulated fondness, his mind has pictured Patience Pomfret. You have been but the substantiated shade of Patience Pomfret. When his lips have pressed yours, when his hand has held yours, when his heart has pulsed to strong emotions, Patience alone, though miles away, has been the object of his love. O! are you a woman, and can you pardon him these studied insults, these cruel slights, these crushing indignities?’

When this reasoning forced itself upon her, she half rose from her chair with the intention of rushing to the bedside of her dying husband, and denouncing him as the destroyer of the happiness of her wedded life, the bequeather of a legacy of misery to her widowhood.

But a still small voice checked her, and she listened to it. This is what it said:

‘Forgive him! O, yes; a thousand times, yes! Is not heaven based upon forgiveness? Who among men is perfect? Who can go before the

Throne of Grace and say, "I come with clean hands—I am immaculate, therefore let me sit on the right hand"? If you have to take up your cross, in imitation of your Redeemer, has not your husband done so? Has he not suffered? Think over what you have just heard. You have enjoyed his love, such as it was, while she who gave her whole heart to him pined for it, and was obliged to stifle the spark of affection in her breast, lest it might consume her. Fancy her in her self-sought poverty! Fancy her in her poor and miserable home, working for a wretched pittance, and subsisting on the dry hard crust of honest labour, and all because she loved him and would not betray his secret, would not consign him to a prison as a bigamist, and would not wreck your happiness! Had she any ill-will toward you? Did any single action of hers show it? Not one. You are not so very much wronged after all. Then have mercy upon your husband, as you hope for mercy yourself on that dread day when there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, and even justice shall be meted out to the just and unjust.'

The struggle continued.

The lights burned low in the massive candelabra. The stillness was almost deathlike.

A gurgle arose in Lord Linstock's throat. There was a strange coughing sound and a restlessness movement.

Still she did not move.

She could not make her mind up. To forgive or not forgive—that was the question with her, and for a time it defied solution.

The lights burned lower, and the solemn silence was still more oppressive.

An ominous rattling, as if in the dying man's throat, and the hardly audible words 'Celeste! Celeste!' brought her to her feet and dragged her to the bedside, at which she fell on her knees, saying, in a contrite voice,

'I forgive you! You have my blessing! Let the past be buried in the hope of a happier future!'

Her impassioned tones raised no answer except their own echo.

The silence was awful!

It was too late! The spirit had passed from earth to heaven, and Lord Linstock was no more.

Hardly able to credit the evidence of her senses, she staggered to the head of the bed, drew back the heavy curtains, and gazed upon the face of the dead.

Her face assumed an agonised expression. She shrieked at the top of her voice. The door of the room was flung violently open, and the apartment was full of people.

Lady Linstock fell back into the arms of an attendant, and lapsed into insensibility.

Such was the end of Lord Linstock. Whether he was more sinned against than sinning is a question that it would be difficult to venture to decide; but that he was both unlucky and unhappy there can be no question.

CHAPTER XXIV

EFFECTS OF THE POTION.

THE Honourable Valentine Bridgeman was utterly at a loss to account for the stupid condition

—almost amounting to insanity—in which he found Maurice Fenwick.

His first thought was that he had so far forgotten himself as to drink too much; but Valentine had seen many men intoxicated. He had studied the signs and symptoms, he knew the vacant expression, the bleared eyes, the parched lips, the staggering gait, the silly speech, the obstinacy of the drunken man.

He did not find all these portrayed to his satisfaction in Maurice Fenwick's demeanour.

He was puzzled.

Mrs. Sandford Saville had been watching her unhappy victim from a distance.

She noted well the gradual failing of his intellectual faculties, and the prostration of his bodily strength, which was sympathetically affected.

Unmoved she witnessed all this, and calling to her daughter, who was conversing with Fanny Freemantle, said:

‘Come, Felicia, with me. Let us visit your father and his friends in the card-room.’

‘O! do take me, Mrs. Saville!’ cried Fanny Freemantle.

‘Certainly, if you will be kind enough to come.’

Mrs. Saville, followed by the two girls, purposely made a circuit which she knew would bring her to that portion of the wall against which Maurice was leaning.

Felicia's keen eyes at once detected her lover, and she felt her heart sink within her as she saw those inexplicable signs which had so terribly perplexed her brother Mortimer.

What in the name of goodness could be the matter with him? Only an hour or so before they

had been together. Maurice had opened bottles of wine for them in the Bower of Roses, and had drunk with them. Could he have exceeded the limits of moderation? Her knowledge of his character at once emphatically answered no, but she wavered in her opinion as she continued to gaze upon him.

Mrs. Saville, as may be expected, did not fail to make use of the opportunity.

She first looked at Maurice and then at Mortimer, almost at the same time beckoning the latter, who approached her wonderingly.

‘Who’s that man?’ inquired Mrs. Saville.

‘Fenwick,’ replied Mortimer. ‘I saw him with you an hour ago. It seems that a change has come over the spirit of his dream. I can’t for the life of me make him out. He rolls about and jeers and jabbbers just like an idiot. Never saw such a thing in all my life, and I’ve seen a few men screwed too.’

‘Go up to him, Mortimer,’ said Mrs. Saville, simulating an interest in him. ‘He is a friend of the family, you know, and the scandal will be so great. For goodness’ sake do something. Can’t you prevail upon him to go without any fuss?’

‘I’ve tried all I know. Tried my hardest, but he won’t move. There he stands and jabbbers for all the world like a Punch and Judy show.’

‘Is that your *preux chevalier*?’ said Fanny Freemantle to Felicia.

‘Yes,’ was the laconic reply.

‘O! for shame! Why don’t you teach him better manners? Fancy one’s *cher ami* getting tipsy! O! isn’t it dreadful!—and look there. Pooshay and Peevles are looking on and laughing!’

‘Odious creatures!’ said Felicia.

‘Well, who wouldn’t laugh? I declare I am dying to indulge my pent-up laughter. How helpless the man looks! I never saw one more completely stultified.’

‘Mamma,’ said Felicia.

‘Well, my dear.’

‘May I—would it be proper for me to go and speak to him and ask him to go quietly home? If it would—’

‘It is entirely a matter of taste, my dear,’ replied Mrs. Saville. ‘As it happens, this part of the room is fortunately nearly deserted, though if we stay here long we are sure to have a crowd after us. If you think yourself justified in—’

‘O! mamma, don’t talk to me like that when I want your guidance,’ cried Felicia.

Mrs. Saville pretended not to hear this remark, for, turning to Fanny Freemantle, she said:

‘Is it not sad to see a man forgetting the respect he owes to everybody, and losing all his self-esteem at the same time? I assure you it pains me as much as if he were my own son. But then, you know, we must make allowances.’

‘For what?’ demanded Fanny Freemantle, raising her eyebrows.

‘Mr. Fenwick is only the son of a country apothecary.’

‘Indeed! I was not aware of that.’

Felicia could not bear these taunts and innuendoes any longer.

Goaded to fury, exasperated beyond endurance, she hastily approached Maurice, and looking him hard in the face with tearful eyes, said:

‘Maurice—Mr. Fenwick—do pray go home.’

Mortimer will go with you. Be advised by me. Go home. All will be forgotten in the morning, so few have seen you at present. *Do go home.*

Instead of replying to this earnest exhortation, Maurice looked stupidly at her, and burst into a loud, silly laugh, which so shocked and annoyed her that she went back to her mother blushing to the temples, and trembling with rage and vexation, and feeling more mortified than she ever remembered to have been.

‘O! mamma, it is dreadful to see any one like that,’ she said.

‘So it is, dear, but you brought the rebuff on yourself. I do not altogether regret it, for it will teach you the value, and I may say the necessity, of maidenly reserve. It would have been much more ladylike of you to have remained quietly by my side.’

Mrs. Saville spoke in a patronising tone, and stretched out her arms as she spoke as if taking her daughter under the wings of her protection.

Turning to Mortimer, she continued:

‘Please see Mr. Fenwick home. I should not like this sort of thing to continue much longer—it is too disgraceful. Please see to it, will you?’

‘All right,’ replied Mortimer. ‘I’ll put him in a cab and slip him off to his lodgings. Don’t put the shutters up till I come back.’

‘How vulgar Mortimer is becoming!’ that young gentleman’s mother observed to Felicia, who was intently watching Maurice—with his white tie disarranged, his gibus hat put inartistically on his head with careless indifference—Maurice of the vacant look and still more vacant laugh. How different from the Maurice of a few hours ago!

Mortimer took him by the arm, and dragged rather than led him from the room.

When he had disappeared, Felicia heaved a deep sigh, and walked away with her mother and Fanny Freemantle, who rattled away in her own peculiar fashion about the breach of propriety they had just witnessed.

‘Don’t you think, dear Mrs. Saville, that a man looks very ridiculous when he is tipsy? What a goose a man must be to do it! If any one I knew and cared for—O, ever so little—was to do so before people, I do really think I should nevermore speak to him again.’

Some one approached Felicia and begged the honour of the next dance.

With a feeble ‘Yes,’ and a cold, stony smile, she gave him the desired permission.

As she walked away with her hand resting gently on the arm of her partner, the Honourable Valentine Bridgeman made his appearance, and looking considerably put out at finding Felicia was engaged, and so, in fact, was Mrs. Saville.

‘Ah, Mr. Bridgeman,’ she exclaimed, ‘we are delighted to see you. Where have you been? Playing cards, I presume. I really think that horrid card-room ought to be abolished. It always deprives us of the society of the nicest men.’

Valentine was about to make some appropriate reply, when a servant in the Saville livery approached bearing something on a silver salver.

It was a telegraphic message.

‘For you, sir, if you please,’ he said. ‘A man has just brought it from your hotel.’

Carelessly Valentine took up the telegram, saying to Mrs. Saville :

‘Have I your permission?’

‘O, yes, certainly,’ was the reply.

With the same carelessness he broke the seal, and read the three or four lines it contained.

His cheek turned pale—ashy pale—and he crushed the telegram in his hand, betraying all the evidences of strong emotion.

‘Pray may I ask if anything has occurred—if anything is the matter?’ said Mrs. Saville.

‘My father died at nine o’clock this evening!’

‘Died! Is it possible! Then you are Lord Linstock.’

‘I suppose so!’

‘What a shocking loss! How terribly sudden! Permit me to assure you of my most cordial sympathy. How precarious human existence is! What a dreadful bereavement!’

These disconnected sentences fell in quick succession from Mrs. Sandford Saville’s lips. She was only too glad to think that the husband she intended for her daughter was a peer of the realm instead of a simple Honourable, and that he would have the vast estates in his own possession.

‘Pardon me, Mrs. Saville, if I run away somewhat abruptly. But this news is so unexpected that I am completely overcome. I am hardly myself. I am not, indeed.’

‘Do not think of apologising,’ said Mrs. Saville, in reply to the young man’s agitated remarks.

Making a hurried bow, Valentine turned round, and the next moment was gone.

With joy in her heart, Mrs. Saville sought her husband, to make him the recipient of what she did not hesitate to call good news.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

MRS. SANDFORD SAVILLE felt proudly triumphant, for she thought her daughter would marry the representative of an ancient house, the annals of which were glorious, and the ancestors, whose pictures hung in the long galleries at Hadlow, she knew had made their names famous in history.

With a little tact and management she felt certain that she could bring about a marriage between Felicia and Valentine Bridgeman, now Lord Linstock.

She considered that the Fates were propitious, because no sooner had she ridded herself of Maurice Fenwick, in what she called a clever manner without bringing the stain of blood upon her soul, than Lord Linstock died.

Of course, his vast estates—she did not know how they were encumbered—passed to Valentine, so that Felicia would unite herself with one who was not only noble but rich.

The colour rose to her cheeks and she flashed disdainful glances around her as she passed up the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room in search of her husband, giving a word to this one, a friendly grasp of the hand to another, and speaking a few unmeaning phrases to some party about to take their leave.

As the mother of Lady Linstock, she would be able to take a higher place in the fashionable world than she had hitherto been able to reach—doors which had been ordinarily closed to the wife of the

wealthy City man would fly open as if by magic to the mother of a peeress.

Then all her ambitious wishes would be gratified, and she would have gained the top of fashion's tree.

Mr. Sandford Saville was nowhere to be found. He had left the card-room, and one of the servants, in reply to questions put to him, said that he had seen his master go down-stairs to his study.

Mrs. Saville's face darkened as she heard this announcement, and taking advantage of an opportunity she also left the ball-room, and sought her husband in the retreat he had chosen.

He was sitting in an armchair with his feet resting upon a footstool, smoking a handsomely-carved meerschaum pipe, the burning tobacco in the bowl of which emitted a hazy cloud of slowly-curling smoke. His face wore an air of preoccupation, if not of absolute dejection.

Looking up and perceiving that his wife was the intruder upon his privacy, he seemed annoyed, but did not venture to make any decided remonstrance, knowing very well that he would infallibly get the worst of any verbal encounter that might take place.

Mrs. Saville was not moved in the slightest at beholding the sad careworn look which sat upon his pallid countenance.

She had come down expressly to scold him, and she did not intend to spare her indignant comments upon his conduct.

'Upon my word, Sandford,' she exclaimed, 'you grow worse and worse. Fancy the master of the house leaving the ballroom as you have done!

It is useless for me to try to make a position if I have to contend with your eccentricities.'

'I only came down-stairs, my dear, to have a quiet pipe,' he remonstrated.

'This is not the time for it. You know that it is three o'clock, and the bulk of the people will not go away till five or six, therefore it is your imperative duty to be on the spot. If you are not a gentleman by birth or education, you can, it is to be hoped, assume the semblance of gentility at my dictation.'

This speech roused Mr. Saville a little from his lethargy. Putting his pipe down upon the table he looked steadily at his wife, and replied :

'My dear, you are the last woman in the world who ought to speak of antecedents.'

Apparently there was nothing in this remark at all calculated to arouse the wrath of the lady to whom it was addressed. It had that effect, however, for Mrs. Saville's face became as red as fire, and she had great difficulty in suppressing her rage.

'You dare to taunt me!' she cried, with all the fiery force of one in whose breast slumbered a dash of the tigress ; 'you—you, who are no better than a midnight robber, a prowling thief, the stealer of other people's moneys—you cowardly reptile, weak-minded, contemptible wretch that you are ! I could place the felon's fetters on your wrists this very night did I choose to do so.'

Mr. Sandford Saville had evidently touched a tender chord, and he did all he could to deprecate and to allay the storm he had called into existence by the utterance of an unguarded speech. He turned pale, and said, in an anxious tone :

‘I wish to goodness, my dear, you would not be so passionate, and that you would talk in a lower key, for were the servants to overhear your not very flattering observations I might get into trouble. Just be good enough to sit down, will you, and listen to me. Since you have introduced a disagreeable subject without your usual delicacy, I will say a few words that I have had on the tip of my tongue for some time past.’

‘Say what you like, only be as brief as you can, for I shall be missed from the drawing-room.’

‘Well, to oblige you, I will put the matter in a nutshell. I suppose the door is shut and that we are not likely to be interrupted?’

‘No—no. Go on.’

‘Ever since the little affair at the bank,’ continued the manager, ‘I have not been myself. If Frank Barclay—poor fellow!—had not been arrested for the crime which I committed, I should have gone about with a better and easier conscience; but I swear before heaven—and I am not in the habit of taking emphatic oaths—that I have not had a moment’s peace since Frank Barclay was committed for trial!’

‘You cannot—’

‘Nay, hear me out,’ said Mr. Saville, holding up his hand at his wife’s interruption, in order to check her. ‘I cannot sleep; I cannot eat; I am afraid to think; and come what may, if the jury find Barclay guilty, I will step forward and proclaim his innocence—I will, so help me, heaven!’

Mrs. Saville looked aghast.

‘What!’ she cried, with flashing eyes and heaving breast, ‘have you no courage—no self-respect—no self-love?’

‘No,’ he replied, shaking his head in a melancholy manner. ‘No—no—no; it is all gone—all knocked out of me by the force of recent events!’

‘You cannot be so mad, so insensate, as to mean what you say, Sandford! Tell me that you only made that declaration about giving yourself up and saving Barclay so that you might frighten and annoy me! Tell me that you didn’t mean it, there’s a good man, and I will forgive you everything. Speak the truth and say you didn’t mean it!’

‘I have spoken the truth,’ he replied solemnly.

‘You have?’

‘Yes, I have, as I hope for mercy for my sins hereafter. I will make atonement should it be necessary. I could never look a man in the face again if I allowed that poor fellow to be carted away to gaol, to pine away and die in penal servitude.’

‘Yes—yes! That sentiment is all very fine,’ said Mrs. Saville; ‘but you seem to forget that the choice is between you and Barclay—one of you the law must have. If you save Barclay, it is you—*you*—that will be carted away to gaol, to pine in penal servitude. How will you like that? How will you like working in chains all your life, away from me, from your children, from everyone?’

‘I cannot help it. Perhaps the Almighty will support me under it; but save Barclay I will, come what may—*ruat cœlum*.’

‘You wring my heart,’ said his wife passionately, ‘and at the same time you enrage me to such a pitch that I could take a dagger and stab you to the heart. Do you know that you are ruining us all with your silly namby-pamby philanthropy?’

You may, as you say, owe a duty to Barclay; but do you not owe a duty to your wife and family? Is it right to sacrifice these, because a terrible weight of shame and degradation will fall upon us? Feely's prospects will be blighted for ever. Have you forgotten we have a daughter to marry?'

Mr. Saville was strangely moved.

He loved his family, and he knew, as a practical man, that what his wife said was true.

If he gave himself up to the law-officers, and was placed in the felon's dock on the Crown side at the Old Bailey, every one would turn their backs upon the Savilles, who would, to a great extent, become social outcasts and human pariahs.

Many years, perhaps a lifetime, would they have to live in quarantine before they could purify themselves sufficiently for a pardon to be accorded them. The whisper of scandal would always follow them wherever they went, and such remarks as 'There are the Savilles;' 'You remember the great bank robbery, don't you? Ah, then, I needn't enter into particulars!' would be made.

'Heaven bless Felicia! she is a good girl,' he said, in a lachrymose tone. 'Yet I am convinced that she would not endeavour to dissuade me from my intention. I am positive she would urge me to take the step, although in effect it would make her an orphan. Heaven is good, and would take compassion on her!'

'I have no patience with you, Sandford,' said his wife, with great irritation displayed in her voice and manner. 'It is quite distressing to hear you talk. I think I should be justified in consulting a medical man about your sanity, for really you cannot be quite right in your head. I have

heard you say that madness was known in your family !'

Mr. Saville laughed coldly, almost harshly, as if the idea of being thought a lunatic was novel to him.

'Hear what I came down-stairs to tell you,' continued Mrs. Saville.

'Yes.'

'Lord Linstock is dead !'

'Dead ?'

'Yes ; and consequently Valentine is the present lord, inherits all the property, and is a man whom Felicia could marry at any time, if she only could be induced to take the trouble ; no one ever catches a big fish without some exertion. I know from my own observations that Mr. Bridgeman has a great fondness for Felicia ; and yet, when everything is going on well, and all our prospects are bright, you want to dash the cup of joy and satisfaction from my lips, and plunge me into an abyss of despair. I conjure you to pause. Think, think, Sandford, of the misery you will bring upon us !'

'I must do my duty,' was the stern, inflexible reply.

Regulus taking leave of his family to return to captivity in Carthage could not have shown more firmness.

Mrs. Saville was about to say something, but she checked herself, looked down at the carpet for a short time, and presently exclaimed :

'You are out of sorts to-night. You will think differently in the morning. I am positive you do not really wish to bring an avalanche about our heads. Come up-stairs with me. Come !'

Reluctantly he obeyed, gave her his arm, and they ascended the grand staircase together.

Hardly had they entered the room, however, before Mrs. Sandford Saville clutched her husband's arms violently, exclaiming, in a hoarse, terrified whisper :

‘Look, look, Sandford ! Do you see that man ?’

‘Where, my dear ?’

‘There—there ; to the right of you.’

Mr. Saville followed the direction indicated by his wife's eyes, and saw the tall man who had appeared at the Mansion House when Francis Barclay was on his preliminary examination.

‘I see him. What of him ?’

‘It is Zadok—Zadok Hoskisson, the man who—but you know the story. How came he here ? I fancied him in Australia. O, that the earth would open and swallow him up ! I have ever dreaded him. My prophetic soul has always brought him before me and predicted this meeting. O, it is awful !’

The individual to whom Mrs. Saville gave the name of Zadok Hoskisson bowed stiffly to her, and approaching her, said :

‘Permit me to congratulate you on your good looks ; this climate evidently agrees with you, Mrs.—’

He hesitated, adding :

‘Shall I say—’

‘Saville !’ she cried hurriedly.

‘O, do not be alarmed,’ continued Mr. Hoskisson calmly. ‘No one is within earshot, and I am sure your amiable husband would forgive a little familiarity from an old friend. Why, you may almost look upon me as your guardian !’

He laid peculiar stress upon the word 'guardian,' and Mrs. Saville became the colour of scarlet.

'By the way, I must ask you to pardon me for talking of business, but this is such an admirable opportunity that I do not like to neglect it. The fact is, I want to open an account at the Royal Bubble Bank, and if I should be compelled, by the exigencies of commerce'—here he smiled sardonically—'to overdraw my account a few thousands, of course you will not object to Saville's honouring my drafts, which, as manager, he can easily do.'

'Certainly not,' replied Mrs. Saville. 'I have no doubt that you may rely upon Sandford's kindness to arrange that for you in accordance with your wish.'

'Thanks—that is all I have to ask. I wish you good-night. Saville, I shall see you in the City in the morning.'

He turned coolly on his heel without waiting for Saville's reply, and left husband and wife looking at one another blankly and with consternation.

Mrs. Saville was the first to recover her self-possession and equanimity.

'You must do as he asks, Sandford,' she said.

'It is all very well to say that, but—'

'What?'

'It's a criminal matter, if they prove culpable negligence on my part.'

'What will that matter to you if, as you say, you are going to save Barclay?'

'I am half distracted between one thing and another,' said the unhappy man. 'But I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence—that's one comfort.'

‘Zadok could do me so much harm. You must conciliate him. I hope his appearance is not a bad omen. I hope that it does not prognosticate my fall. But the clouds are gathering around me, and there is no telling what the future may reveal.’

With these philosophic commonplaces on her lips, the lady sat down *à la* dowager, and devoted her attention exclusively to her friends, who were beginning to take their leave.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOPE DEFERRED.

FELICIA was shocked and disgusted at what was thought Maurice Fenwick’s inebriety. To a girl of her delicate mind and strong temperance proclivities, anything of the sort was a disgraceful exhibition, which, while she was generous enough to forgive, she was by her innate standard of rectitude compelled to deplore.

Fully expecting that he would call and apologise for his conduct, she daily anticipated his coming, longing for his explanation, and determined to exact a promise from him that he would never again be tempted to indulge to excess in spirituous liquors.

But day after day passed, Time glided by with his scarcely perceptible motion and his impalpable footstep, but Maurice Fenwick did not appear.

Her first idea was that he was ashamed to show

his face inside a house where he had behaved so badly, and with this uppermost in her mind she took an opportunity of questioning Mortimer one morning when he was putting on his hat in the hall, preparatory to going to the Belligerent Office.

‘Mortimer!’ she exclaimed.

‘Well, puss,’ he replied.

‘How is Maur—I mean Mr. Fenwick?’

‘As bad as he can be.’

‘What do you mean? What is the matter with him?’ she said, as her eyes dilated with a vague horror of something dreadful.

‘He’s got a slate loose.’

‘O, do not talk slangily. Make use of language I can understand.’

‘He’s out of his mind, then. Can you understand that?’

‘Out—of—his—mind?’ she repeated slowly.

‘Yes.’

‘Don’t joke with me, Mortimer. Dear, dear Mortimer’—she held out her hand enticingly—‘don’t trifle with my feelings; you don’t know *how* I—I love him.’

‘Love him?’ repeated Mortimer scornfully. ‘Better pity him, he wants it bad enough. He is, as I tell you, mad, or more strictly speaking idiotic.’

‘What has made him so?’

‘That nobody knows. Perhaps it is constitutional. I have met with cases of a sudden collapse of the faculties.’

‘Then he was not tipsy that night?’

‘Tipsy? No, not a bit of it. It was the beginning of a malady. He is now a hopeless drivelling idiot.’

O! had he known the acute agony his sharp-

pointed dagger-like words inflicted upon his sister, his manly feeling would have instructed him to weigh his remarks and choose them with more care, so as to spare her unnecessary misery, and most, most poignant anguish.

‘The day after to-morrow,’ he continued, ‘he is to be removed to an asylum. I know that many of his friends have been up to see him, and I looked in yesterday because the *mater* asked me.’

‘Mamma asked you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And it is really true?’

‘O, there’s no doubt about it. It is all true enough. I wish it wasn’t, for though I didn’t like the man much, it is awfully sad to see a fellow come to such grief.’

‘So it is all true?’ she murmured vacantly.

‘Well, I must be off,’ said Mortimer.

While he was speaking he heard a sound, half sob, half gasp, and turning round he saw Felicia fall to the ground insensible.

‘Here! Help! Here!’ he cried at the top of his voice.

Mrs. Saville rushed out of the breakfast-room and said:

‘What is the matter?’

‘Why, Felicia’s in a fit, I think; you’d better get some burnt feathers, sal-volatile, or something, hadn’t you?’

Though Felicia’s swoon was of long duration, nature was obliged to obey the power of the restoratives which were applied by the anxious mother, but she was so weak, so exhausted, and so hysterical, that she had to be taken up-stairs and be put to bed. At intervals she would burst into a vio-

lent flood of tears, and sob as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Saville, with her usual tact, was not long in discovering the cause of this unwonted emotion; drawing Mortimer on one side, she said:

‘What have you been saying to her to cause all this agitation?’

‘I merely mentioned Maurice Fenwick, and said that he was an idiot.’

‘It was injudicious to mention it, but it does not much matter, as she must have been made acquainted with the fact sooner or later.’

For some days Felicia was very ill, but she recovered her serenity by degrees, and her mother flattered herself that the first shock had passed off, and that she would be inclined to listen to reason when she found that it was impossible that she could ever be united to Maurice Fenwick.

Felicia appeared to take no interest in the unhappy young man, but she did in reality warmly regard him.

One evening Mortimer made his appearance in the drawing-room; he was in evening dress, and going up to his sister, he exclaimed:

‘Lend me your purse, Feely. I am going out, and I haven’t a rap.’

Felicia at once did so, handing it to him without a word.

‘Is it well lined?’ he queried.

‘Yes, tolerably so! By the way, have you seen or heard anything of poor Mr. Fenwick lately?’

‘Yes, he’s gone.’

‘Where?’

‘To a private asylum.’

‘Yes, yes. But where?’

‘O ! I see what you mean ; at Bath.’

‘Bath ? Thank you. Going out, didn’t you say ? I hope you will enjoy yourself !’

He reciprocated this sentiment in his heart, and once more thanking his sister for the money she had lent him, went away rejoicing.

Felicia took up the book she was reading, which was a novel rather stilted and vapid in style, and pretended to take great interest in its perusal. Her little heart was beating at the rate of sixty to the minute, for she was possessed of a daring spirit, and she had conceived a scheme, which, if carried out successfully, would at all events place her doubts at rest.

She knew her mother to be wicked and unprincipled. She knew Maurice to be innocent and good. He had often told her that he endeavoured to lead a blameless life, and she could not bring herself to believe that this young man was in reality the victim of a terrible visitation of God.

It might be so ; but the whole occurrence was so sudden and mysterious that it astonished her. A whispering spirit suggested that her mother might have had a hand in the occurrence, and she resolved to take the advice of a medical man upon the subject.

Lying back in her armchair, she allowed her book to fall upon her lap, her hand hung listlessly by her side, and she put on a languishing air, which she knew would speedily arrest her mother’s attention.

Nor was she mistaken.

Mrs. Saville noticed that Felicia looked ill and wan, and she deprecated any exhibition of pallor, because if she began to lose her beauty and her

good looks her chance of marrying Lord Linstock would be extremely slender. So Mrs. Saville approached her daughter and said, in a tone of genuine commiseration :

‘You seem very poorly to-night, my darling?’

‘Yes, mamma dear,’ replied Felicia softly. ‘I am not at all myself. I believe I want change of air to set me up again.’

‘Where would you like to go?’ inquired the anxious mother.

‘To Bath, mamma,’ replied the sagacious daughter.

‘I think I might spare a week to go with you. But will not Brighton do as well?’

‘Brighton now, mamma? It is not the fashionable time. You would find nobody there but lodging-house keepers, and what Mortimer calls “cashy Jews.”’

‘Very well, my dear ; you shall go if you have a desire to do so, and I hope, I am sure, the change may do you good. We have very few engagements luckily, just now, and I will write and make excuses.’

‘Thanks, mamma dear,’ said Felicia, squeezing her hand. ‘You are very kind to me.’

This was slightly hypocritical on Felicia’s part, but she excused this hypocrisy—which was not very naughty after all—because she thought the end would justify the means, provided that end were the unravelling of a diabolical scheme, and the restoration of Maurice Fenwick. Her reason for going to Bath was that she would be able to call upon a doctor and commission him to go to the lunatic asylum in which her friend was confined, and examine him. She would put him

in possession of all the facts as far as she was acquainted with them. And if he were of opinion that the unfortunate man was truly and actually, by the gradual process of and in obedience to the laws of Nature, an idiot, she would submit herself to the inscrutable will of the Almighty, and give herself up a sinless prey to that lasting grief which soon hurries its victim to the grave.

Having determined to marry Maurice, she had hoped for the arrival of the day when she would be his wife, when everything would be made clear.

This hope had sustained her.

When this fragile prop was knocked away from under her feet she was only able to murmur: 'Thy will be done,' and sink beneath the sore infliction of the mighty blow.

On her arrival in the city of Bath, eloquent with its thousand memories, redolent of a bygone greatness, instinct with shadowy forms, the phantoms of a peopled past, her spirits rose, not because the air was balmy, not because the waters invigorated her, not because the verdant hills, which met her gaze at every step, pointed towards heaven and bade her hope, but because she was near the object of her adoration.

For she did adore him.

Yes; poor in spirit, bankrupt in health and intellect as he was, she loved him. Decayed, robbed of all his intellectual glory, reduced to the level of a very poor creature, she still clung to him with all a woman's never-dying fondness.

As a matter of course, Felicia asked her mother to call in the best doctor the town could boast, and he was accordingly called in.

Mr. Masterman Hall was undoubtedly a clever practitioner, but he could not detect any symptoms of disease about Felicia.

At first he treated hers as an ordinary case of consumption; but when replies were made to his questions he was fairly baffled, and after he had been with his new patient half an hour, he confessed that he could not discover much the matter with her, but that he would send her some medicine for general debility, and would like to see her within the course of a couple of days.

In the mean time he should recommend her to visit the assembly-rooms and the pump-room, where she would be able to listen to the inspiring music, and take the water; which would probably be beneficial, and could not, by any possibility, be injurious. Felicia promised to obey these instructions implicitly.

She could not speak before her mother; but she resolved to do so when she saw the worthy doctor again.

The time soon passed, and when she was a second time in Mr. Masterman Hall's presence, she said:

‘I wish to be frank with you, doctor.’

‘Do so, my dear young lady, and pray be seated. My time is at your disposal, and I shall be happy to listen, but—excuse an old man like myself—perhaps I can spare you some embarrassment by suggesting the old, old story—an affair of the heart, hostile parents, broken hearts, and an incomparable young man for your intended husband.’

Felicia smiled. It was a sickly smile, the ghost of a proper hearty smile, but it was forced

from her by the doctor's impulsive good-humour and sagacity.

'You have only made a partial guess. I would have explained all to you, and my object in coming here, but I could not do so before mamma. My story is a very sad one. I love a young man, whom, as you surmised, my mother dislikes. He was strong and in excellent health, with a vigorous intellect, and every accomplishment in which a young man can take a pride was his. He was clever at boating, fishing, cricket, riding, driving, skating, and last, but not least, volunteering.'

'Quite an Adonis, with the advantage of muscular Christianity.'

'Yes, if you like to think so. Well, his name is Fenwick. He came to a ball at our house one night, and danced with me several times. I never saw him in better health, and he did not complain of being ill, but suddenly a change came over him, and he appeared to be insensibly tipsy.'

'Are you sure he was not?'

'I am positive. He was taken away in a cab, and I did not hear of him for a few days.'

'And what then?' inquired the doctor, who was becoming interested in her recital.

'Then I was told that he was an idiot.'

'An idiot!' repeated Mr. Masterman Hall, springing to his feet in the utmost surprise.

'So they told me. A hopeless idiot, and that he had been removed to an asylum by his friends.'

'You may have been deceived. By your own admission there is one who would not hesitate to impose upon your credulity. I do not wish to hurt your feelings as a daughter, but, of course, I allude to your mother.'

‘You can verify everything I have said; and it is with a view of obtaining your valuable advice that I have come to Bath. I want you to verify the truth of what I have told you.’

‘How?’

‘Mr. Fenwick has been taken to an asylum for idiots either in Bath or in the neighbourhood.’

‘That is singular,’ said Mr. Masterman Hall, ‘for there is only one establishment of that description here, and that is kept by my brother.’

‘Really, how fortunate!’ said Felicia.

‘So you perceive that if the story you have been told is correct, Mr. Fenwick must be at my brother’s, where I can do just as I like.’

‘Will you then have the great kindness to go and see Mr. Fenwick, examine him, and let me have your opinion?’

‘What do you think or suspect?’ said the doctor, with a keen glance.

‘I am afraid to say what I think or suspect. It is terrible to suspect one’s own flesh and blood, doctor, to look harshly upon those who are nearest and dearest to us.’

‘So it is, my dear young lady. I will go this afternoon and see what I can discover. When shall I see you again?’

‘Whenever you like.’

‘Shall you be at the assembly-rooms?’

‘I think I heard mamma say something about going.’

‘Very well. Be there, if you please; you will see your humble servant, and he will have much pleasure in reporting progress. I confess candidly that in the whole course of my experience I never met with a similar case, and I have been some

years in practice, too. To lose one's faculties in that hop, skip, and jump manner! why, it seems preposterous: an utter collapse of that sort, not brought on by any predisposing causes, is a phenomenon in the annals of medical science. Good-bye, my dear young lady. I will not detain you any longer. Don't forget the assembly-rooms.'

Felicia repeated her promise to visit that fashionable place of amusement in the evening, and took her leave with a very high opinion of Mr. Masterman Hall.

How slowly the lagging time appeared to go! How she wished that its feet were winged like those of Mercury! Time, however laggard it may be, cannot stand still, and at length Felicia found herself at the assembly-rooms, looking for the doctor, and wondering whether the shade of Beau Nash ever stole away from the land of spirits to take a sly peep at mankind, and see what they are doing in what was once his own particular domain.

Mr. Masterman Hall approached the ladies, spoke to Mrs. Saville, and said:

'Will you permit your daughter to take a turn up the room with me? I will point out all the celebrities to her.'

Mrs. Saville graciously consented, although her vanity made her think that it would have been much better taste on the doctor's part had he chosen the mother instead of the daughter as the companion of his promenade.

'Now, my dear young lady,' began the doctor, when they were out of hearing, 'don't agitate yourself and make your pretty cheeks look like a blush rose.'

‘No—no, doctor, but I cannot help being a little anxious. Just a wee-wee bit.’

‘Certainly not. I have seen the young gentleman.’

‘You have! and how is he?’

‘Precisely what you described—idiotic.’

‘Is there then no hope?’

‘That I am not prepared to say. It certainly is a most extraordinary case, and both my brother and myself think that there is more below the surface than we are able to see.’

‘In other words—’

‘In other words, Miss Saville, it may be possible that he may have been the victim of a noxious drug.’

‘You think so?’

‘I do, but I do not assert it for a positive fact. All I say is, it may be so. There are vegetable combinations which will wreck a man’s intellect and shatter his mind.’

‘I feared so. So there is no hope for him?’

‘When there is a bane there is generally an antidote.’

‘Give it me, then. Give it me this minute, and let me fly to him!’ cried Felicia impulsively.

‘Not so fast, young lady—not so fast! In the first place, I do not know the bane, therefore I cannot be expected to be acquainted with the antidote,’ replied the doctor, checking her enthusiasm.

Her countenance fell.

‘You can do nothing for me?’

‘Nothing, except—’

‘Ha! you make an exception! Bless you for even the smallest scrap of comfort—the minutest crumb of hope!’

‘I can give you advice.’

‘Of what kind?’

‘If, as we suspect, your mother—heaven grant I do her no injustice in so doing—has had a hand in this iniquity—if it be an iniquity—she must have derived her information from a chemist of no mean ability, and from him, doubtless, she obtained the drug. He, and he alone, is the man from whom to procure the antidote which will make Mr. Fenwick himself again. Do you then watch her carefully and worm her secret out of her. That is my advice. I wish most sincerely I could do more for you.’

Felicia experienced that dull, leaden feeling of despair which comes over us when a hope strongly entertained is dashed to atoms, and we have nothing left to rely upon; and her eloquent countenance denoted the desolation of her heart—poor bruised, bleeding heart that it was!

CHAPTER XXVII.

SCHEMING.

THE time for Francis Barclay’s trial approached apace.

Mr. Saville rigidly adhered to his determination of vindicating the innocent, and he would not have swerved a jot or an iota from his set purpose had the stake, the torch, and the fagot been the reward of his heroic martyrdom.

His heart—never a hard one—had been touched in the first instance by Felicia, when he heard her

reading the Bible to herself, and he had dwelt upon the matter until he firmly resolved to let the hidden sin of which he was guilty see the daylight.

Mrs. Saville questioned, reasoned, and argued with him, but all to no purpose. He was simply as inflexible as a bar of cast-iron.

All she could elicit from him was this remarkable speech :

‘I am a rock, and not Satan, with all his legions of fallen angels at his back, can move me!’

When Mrs. Saville fully made up her mind that this was the case, she determined to prevent the sacrifice which her husband was bent upon committing. All she wanted was a tool to work with, a coadjutor, and she found one in the person of one whom she had not seen for some time.

It has been aptly said that a bad halfpenny always turns up.

Michael Saville was a bad one in the full sense of the expressive term, and he turned up when he was least expected.

His friends and companions in iniquity and misfortune had been imprisoned for a longer term than himself, so that when the gaol opened its gates and would have him no longer, he found himself a houseless wanderer upon the face of the earth, with no friends, no home, no money.

As he walked along the busy streets disconsolate, he thought of his sister, and determined to call in the square.

As chance would have it, he met his mother in the hall, and she, thinking he would admirably answer her purpose, received him with much

greater cordiality than he was accustomed to receive at that relative's hands, and, taking him into her boudoir, proceeded to talk to him.

'I am glad to see you, Michael,' she said, 'but you do not know how grieved I was to hear of your disgrace.'

'Never mind. It's over now, and I have suffered enough. Talk of something else, mother,' Michael said impatiently.

'It is my duty to talk to you, but I will spare your feelings, happy to think that where there is shame there is room for amendment,' said Mrs. Saville. 'You have arrived at an opportune moment, for I want you to manage a little matter for me.'

'With pleasure,' replied Michael, who was overjoyed at the prospect of obtaining employment, even though he had the risk before his eyes of putting on the evil one's livery.

'Your father, I am sorry to say, has taken up a strange delusion. I am speaking in strict confidence to you.'

'Of course.'

'You promise me that?'

'Yes. On my—shall I say my honour? I think I have a shred or two left.'

He laughed heartily.

Mrs. Saville took no notice of his discordant laugh, contenting herself with saying:

'The fact is, your father thinks he has committed a robbery, and he is going to denounce himself at the Old Bailey on a certain day; therefore I wish to get him out of the way until the danger is past and he is more inclined to listen to reason.'

‘What do you want me to do?’ inquired Michael.

‘To go to Bath, where Felicia is staying with two maiden ladies for the benefit of her health, and telegraph to me that Feely is dangerously ill.’

‘Yes. I understand,’ said Michael, with an intelligent glance.

‘I will, on receipt of the telegram, send your father to Bath. You must meet him at the station, and so contrive matters as to keep him for, say, three days.’

‘Three days?’

‘Yes. If it is necessary that he should be kept longer I will let you know. At every cost and at all hazards he must be kept away from London and from pen and ink during the time I have specified. Will you and can you do it?’

The young man was about to reply when the door opened, and starting up, he exclaimed:

‘Here is my father!’

Mr. Sandford Saville entered, looking first at his wife, and then allowing his eyes to rest suddenly upon his vagabond son.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REASON UNTHRONED.

MR. SANDFORD SAVILLE was much changed within the last few weeks.

When he saw Michael he shook hands with him, coldly and distantly—not with a hearty grasp such as should come from a father to a son.

But it must be remembered that Michael Saville had always been the thorn in his father's side. He had ever given him more annoyance, trouble, and worry than all his other children put together. He was a scamp and a scapegrace, obstinate in the extreme, self-willed, and vicious.

'Why are you not more friendly disposed towards the boy?' exclaimed Mrs. Saville in a tone of displeasure. 'You greet him as if he were something inferior. *You*,' she added, with marked emphasis, 'ought to be the last man in the world to throw stones at anybody.'

Instead of being angry at his wife's plain speaking, Mr. Saville replied very meekly and humbly, as if his spirit was thoroughly crushed and broken.

'Heaven knows that is true enough, my dear. I was not aware that I greeted Michael coldly. I wished to see him. I hold in my hand a letter which very nearly concerns him.'

'Indeed! Who is your correspondent?'

'A scrivener of the name of Blackwood.'

'O!' interposed Michael, with a reckless laugh. 'I know who he means. It is Old Ebony, the money-lender.'

'And I apprehend,' said his father, 'that you are equally well informed as to the purport of Mr. Blackwood's letter?'

'To be sure I am. It is no use making a secret of the matter. I wanted some money a little while ago, before I was laid up in lavender, and I forged my father's name to a bill for a small amount. That's all, mother. There is nothing so very wonderful about that. I suppose Old Ebony threatens to indict me and expose the whole transaction if

the bill is not paid, and a handsome present given him for his forbearance?’

‘Exactly,’ replied Mr. Saville. ‘You have guessed the contents of his letter admirably. The amount of the bill is trifling and insignificant, but the *douceur* he asks is exorbitant. He actually has the audacity to ask for a thousand pounds as the price of his forbearance.’

‘O yes, I can readily believe that. It is just like him,’ said Michael, still careless, still devil-may-care.

‘Let that matter rest awhile!’ exclaimed Mrs. Saville. ‘There are other more pressing matters just at present. If the man finds that we are not alarmed at his threats, he will grow more moderate in his demands, and a much smaller sum than the one named in his letter will satisfy him.’

‘You think so,’ said Mr. Saville doubtfully.

‘I am positive! But listen to me,’ returned his wife. ‘I have been having a serious conversation with Michael, and he has given me his most sacred promise that he will abandon the bad and vicious course of life he has been leading, and endeavour to conduct himself like a gentleman and a man of honour. At last he sees the error of his ways. He has sown his wild oats, and I think we may trust him. The long imprisonment he has undergone has weakened his health, and I have been thinking of sending him to Bath, where he can stay with Felicia.’

‘A very good idea,’ remarked Mr. Saville, who did not appear to take much interest in what was going on, speaking more because he felt it incumbent upon him to say something than anything else.

‘Felicia is much worse, I am sorry to say. I had letters this morning telling me that she is in some danger. In one from herself to me she especially wishes to see you. “Send my father to me,” she writes. “Send him, if only for a few hours, for I have something of importance to tell him.”’

This was a palpable fiction, for Mrs. Saville had received no letter bearing the Bath postmark during the entire week.

‘Wishes to see me!’ exclaimed Mr. Saville.

‘Yes. Dear me, where is the letter? I thought I had it about me; but I must have left it upstairs in my dressing-case.’

‘Let me see the letter. Shall Michael fetch your dressing-case?’

‘No, it is not necessary. You can believe me, I suppose. How dreadfully suspicious you are becoming lately, Sandford! I declare it is quite painful to have anything to do with you!’ said his wife, with well-affected indignation.

‘I only asked for the letter, my dear.’

‘Never mind. I have told you what it contained, and that must be enough for you. It is unreasonable to expect me to hunt the place over for it. My proposition is that you and Michael go to Bath together. It will be as well for Michael to be out of the way until Blackwood is successfully negotiated with. Start early in the morning, see Felicia, and hear what she has to say, and then return by the afternoon express in time for dinner.’

It will be seen that Mrs. Sandford Saville had somewhat altered her plans.

Her original intention was to let Michael decoy

his father to Bath; but it seemed better to her to induce him to accompany his son.

She wanted to get him out of the way, not caring what stratagem she had recourse to so long as he was not in London when Francis Barclay was tried for breaking into the Royal Bubble Bank and robbing it.

Mrs. Saville felt positive that her husband would give himself up should the jury convict the supposed culprit, and any such act of self-sacrifice would deal a deathblow to her plans and giant schemes, from which she would never, never be able to rally.

Mr. Saville reflected.

He had made inquiries, the result of which was that the Old Bailey Sessions commenced in three days from that time. The case of Francis Barclay would probably be one of the first called on.

If the issue of the trial were what he fully expected it would be, then he would only see his daughter in prison.

He loved her tenderly, and he was strongly urged to adopt his wife's suggestion and run down to Bath, so that he might be the recipient of her confidence.

Mrs. Saville gave him a short time for calculation, and then looking up, said,

'Have you decided?'

He started, as if roused from a deep and absorbing reverie, and replied in the affirmative.

'It is,' he added, 'too late to go to-day, but I will arrange matters so as to start the first thing to-morrow morning with Michael.'

'Very well. I hold you to that promise,' she replied.

He shook hands once more with Michael, and then went into the City, where he transacted his business in a ghostlike gliding manner, as if he were an automaton instead of a man fully imbued with health and energy.

It was sad to see the wonderful alteration which had taken place in him; yet he was to a certain extent happy in the reflection that he should atone for his crime, save the innocent, and make retribution even at the eleventh hour.

Whenever this thought flashed across his mind, a flush of pleasure mantled his pale face, and his features lit up with a transitory gleam of aroused intelligence.

Mrs. Saville impressed her instructions upon Michael with great precision. As soon as his father had left the room she exclaimed,

‘I have altered my programme a little, but it is an alteration for the better. When you have him at Bath you must contrive somehow or other to keep him there. I do not care how, nor does it matter to me what means you employ. Adopt those measures which seem best. If you serve me well in this affair you shall have no cause to regret for having done so, for I will be your friend.’

‘Not before I want one,’ replied Michael in a melancholy tone.

‘Need I say anything more to you?’

‘I think not. I ought to be well posted up if I am not. You may rely upon my keeping the old gentleman until you write to me and tell me to let him go.’

Mrs. Saville gave Michael a couple of notes for ten pounds each, telling him to go and mind

his own affairs, but above all things to hold himself in readiness to start for Bath early the next day.

He promised to do so, and took his leave.

Let us for a time return to Felicia, who derived a melancholy pleasure from the fact of being near the asylum in which Maurice Fenwick was confined.

Her mother fancied that she lingered in the old city of King Bladud because the fresh and balmy air was conducive to the recovery of her health, and because the mineral waters for which the town is famous also worked towards the accomplishment of the same object.

Dr. Masterman Hall took his fair patient to the asylum on one occasion because she begged earnestly of him to do so.

‘Only let me see him, doctor,’ she said, in pleading tones and with tearful accents. ‘Let me see him, and I will bless you with all my heart for the poor privilege. You do not know how attached we were to one another. O, heaven be merciful to me! When I think of the frantic energy with which he loved me, and the priceless wealth of love which I have lost, I feel my reason totter to its fall.’

Dr. Masterman Hall gently urged that it would be better for her to stay away; but she would not be persuaded, and at length he yielded to her solicitations and granted her urgent prayer.

It was a clear sunshiny day when she drove up to the gloomy portals of the place, which looked what it was—a madhouse.

Felicia shuddered as she thought of the terrible condition of the poor creatures who were confined

in the asylum, creatures for whom the smiling aspect of joyful nature possessed no significance. The trees that budded, the flowers which blossomed, the wind which blew, the sun which shone, all spoke to insensible and unappreciative beings. The little feathered songsters of the wood might as well have carolled gaily to a marble statue as to Maurice Fenwick, upon whom a malignant blight had fallen.

Where was now the pride and vigour of his intellect? where now that gushing flood from wisdom's spring, upon the possession of which he used to pride himself?

Gone, gone—all gone! Perhaps never to return!

Felicia was ushered into a gloomy chamber, and awaited in silence the arrival of him for whom she would have laid down her life with pleased willingness.

She trembled violently, so violently that she was obliged to sit down.

It was only by a great effort that she prevented herself from fainting away.

How sick and ill she felt, how sick at heart, how bowed down to the dust and sorely afflicted! Heaven help her!

It is hard to have one's first love blighted by something worse than death.

Were he dead she would know the extent of her trouble, but at present she knew only that he was a man without a mind.

If he had been lying in the graveyard, the cemetery, the last sleeping-place, she could have gone to his tomb and wept over the marble which covered his ashes. She could have planted flowers

upon his grave and have hung chaplets of flowers and never-fading immortelles, that poor consolation of those that mourn.

Maurice Fenwick was led in by two keepers. He was not guarded, for he was as harmless as a lamb, but they guided his footsteps in the right direction. He would have sat down upon the stairs and laughed at the fantastic shadows as they danced and capered over the floor.

The shadows pleased him wonderfully. When the sun passed under a cloud and cast no shadows on the earth, he wept like a child deprived of a plaything, the smile faded from his lips, and he was sullen and morose; this was also his condition on a dull wet day.

Maurice walked up to Felicia, who caught one of his hands in a fervid grasp and covered it with fond kisses.

Maurice seemed utterly unconscious of the act.

Felicia wore a cashmere shawl, the colours of which attracted the poor idiot's attention, and he seized a corner of it and rubbed it up and down between his hands as if its smoothness pleased him.

He looked at Felicia, and she contrived to catch his eye, upon which she fixed her gaze for the space of a quarter of a minute.

Then it appeared as if an awful battle raged between the murky darkness of idiotcy and a strong transparent gleam of sanity and consciousness which wished to drive the usurper from her domain.

His features became convulsed, a violent tremor shook his frame, his limbs quivered, and he evinced all the symptoms of approaching epilepsy.

But the drug of which he was the victim was

sufficiently potent to triumph. A sunbeam struggled into the room, he dropped his gaze, and, running away, fell down on his knees in the middle of the room, and moved his hand up and down in the golden shadow as if he were dabbling in so much quicksilver.

‘Maurice! Maurice!’ cried Felicia, in an agony of despair, ‘do you not know me? O, if he would only speak one word! This is awful, awful, awful!’

The idiot took no notice of her appeal, which was heartrending enough to have moved a stone. He continued to luxuriate in his sunbeam.

Felicia held out her hand to the doctor, and said,

‘Take me away! Please, please take me away! This is more than I can bear!’

She rose to her feet and was about to go away when Maurice turned his face towards her, perhaps aroused by the rustling of her silk dress. He looked so handsome even in his affliction that she thought he must be a statue, for his was statuesque beauty. His features lacked the expression which characterises the faces of the sane. They were perfectly blank.

Unable to resist the propelling force of old memories, she rushed forward, fell on her knees by his side, and pressed her lips to his marble forehead, crying in a tearful voice which vibrated with strong emotion,

‘Bless you, bless you, my soul’s darling! You cannot hear me, you do not understand me; but I pray God on my bended knees to bless you and make you again what you were formerly. Bless you, my own, my best loved one!’

When this transport was over she rose hur-

riedly, and running from the room, sprang into the carriage, in which she gave full vent to her overwhelming grief.

Her sobs and cries were enough to melt a heart of stone, and Dr. Hall wept out of pure sympathy.

Her burden was very heavy, and she found it almost more than she could bear.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CHOOSING THE ALTERNATIVE.

No one can deny that Bath is a pretty place, yet it has the impress of a bygone age about it.

There is more solidity about the houses than there is about modern bricks and mortar.

The pretty murmuring Avon running through the valley suggests the Vale of Tempe. The frowning hills on every side lie mapped out like a garden, with here and there a house, just to show the beholder that the modern Goth is by trade a builder.

Felicia had little time to observe or enjoy the beauties of the town in which she resided, but Dr. Masterman Hall would not permit her to give way to her grief too much.

He insisted, with mild professional authority, upon her taking the air in the park, visiting Clifton, appearing on the promenade in Milsom Street, and occasionally visiting the Pump-room to taste the waters, listen to the music, and see the rank and fashion of Bath.

Michael Saville found no difficulty in getting his father as far as Bath. They proceeded from the station to the house in which Felicia was staying, and she received them both with unaffected gladness, though she was certainly surprised to see them.

‘Sit down, papa,’ said Felicia, when the first greeting was over between them. ‘Try and make yourself at home, if it is possible to do so in a lodging-house. I am very glad to see you, but you must blame yourself if my poor hospitality does not come up to your expectations. You should have sent me notice of your arrival.’

‘Notice, my child!’ exclaimed Mr. Sandford Saville.

‘Yes. You burst upon me quite unexpectedly, and took my little castle by storm.’

‘How can you say that, when you wrote to your mother, and said that you had an important communication to make to me, and on that account begged that I would come and see you?’

It was now Felicia’s turn to be surprised. She had hitherto thought that her father’s kind love for his invalid daughter had induced him to undertake the journey, which, in these days of quick travelling, was not such a very arduous affair after all, but now the matter assumed a different aspect.

‘I wrote to her?’

‘Certainly.’

Felicia walked to her father’s side, and putting her arm upon his shoulder, said earnestly,

‘My dear father, you are mistaken. In the first place, I have not written to my mother for a week; and secondly, I have never expressed a wish to see you, though God knows that wish was often

nearest my heart, for I love you ; yet I forbore to utter it, thinking that I should return to town soon, and that to ask you to neglect your work in the City would be exacting and prejudicial to your interests.'

Mr. Saville appeared perfectly stupefied.

'You did not ask me to come to Bath?'

'No.'

'You are positive? Reflect a moment, my child. Was there no passage in any of your letters that could have been so construed by your mother?'

'Not one. I am certain of that.'

'And yet I am in Bath. What object could your mother have had in telling me a palpable falsehood?'

'Perhaps she wished to surprise me. She may have thought that the unexpected sight of you would do me good and rouse me from what my doctor calls a melancholy state, into which I have lately fallen,' said Felicia, taking the most charitable view of a singular case.

'It may be so,' replied Mr. Sandford Saville musingly. 'I would give a great deal to think so.'

'Has my mother any interest to serve or anything to gain by getting you out of the way?' said Felicia.

'Not to-day. No—not to-day, that I am aware of. Three days later I could have understood it.'

'Am I to understand that in three days you would have refused to leave London?'

'Yes. That is the fact.'

'Then depend upon it that danger menaces you in some way or other,' replied Felicia.

Mr. Saville tried to be gay.

‘I will not regret that your mother has had recourse to stratagem to induce me to come down here,’ he said, in what he wished to be a jocular way; ‘because it has given me the great pleasure of embracing a girl whom I love, and who, by reason of her good heart, is thoroughly deserving of my love.’

Felicia bent over the high back of her father’s chair and imprinted an affectionate kiss upon his brow. Michael had taken no part in this conversation. He had allowed his father and sister to have it all their own way. He knew very well that his turn would shortly arrive, and that then he would have enough to say.

In point of fact he had some reason for silence. His mother had given him a commission to execute, but she had left the *modus operandi* entirely to him, which was slightly embarrassing.

It was all very well for her to say: ‘Here is a cheque for your expenses. You must contrive to keep your father in Bath for three days.’ But she did not condescend to tell him how the slightly difficult operation was to be accomplished.

As he sat on the sofa he was thinking how he might best be a faithful executant of his mother’s will.

It would be easy to declare that his father was a lunatic, and on that ground to claim jurisdiction over him.

It was a thing which had been done before, and which might in all probability be done again with success; or he might have recourse to another plan, which might perhaps be more successful than the other.

He turned the question over in his mind with-

out coming to a decision, and resolved to be guided by circumstances.

In order to facilitate his plans, he simulated the greatest affection for his father, who, unfortunately for himself, believed the pretended affection to be sincere.

Nothing can last for ever. Mr. Saville dined, and spent a happy day with his daughter, who in vain endeavoured to prevail upon her father to stay a little longer.

To this request he demurred, alleging as his excuse that he was compelled to be in town, owing to a press of business at the bank which could not be transacted without him.

He declared that he had not passed a day so pleasantly for a long, long time.

At length a fly was called, and father and son proceeded to the station.

When they had gone some distance Michael begged his father to get out and walk, to which request he acceded without a murmur.

He was in a good temper with himself, and felt that sort of self-gratulation and wonderful satisfaction which Fox's martyrs may have felt before their martyrdom.

Taking from his pocket his watch and chain, to which was appended the locket containing the picture which was to make his fortune some day, and which he had refused to part with in spite of Old Ebony's blandishments, Michael gave them together with his purse to his father, requesting him to take care of them for him.

Mr. Saville was astonished at this request, but he did as his son desired him, and placed them with his own in an inner pocket of his coat.

Michael marked well where he put them.

He had not given him all the money he had about him—merely a few pounds which he had placed in an old *portemonnaie*. The bulk of the proceeds of his mother's cheque was in notes, and those he had carefully concealed about him.

'One would think you were old enough to look after your own property, Michael,' said Mr. Saville, with a laugh.

'I don't think I am,' was the reply. 'You know my character pretty well. I am going to stay here a short time, and perhaps I should get tipsy and lose everything I have in the world.'

'You might, certainly. I will give your property to your mother, who will keep it in trust for you, and, I am sure, praise your determination, which is, at all events, a virtuous one.'

Michael continued to walk by his father's side until he came in sight of a police-station. He then stopped abruptly.

'Are you coming no farther?' inquired Mr. Saville.

'I want to speak to you,' replied Michael. 'Listen attentively to me. It is necessary that you should stay here for at least three days.'

'Eh! what are you saying? Three days! Stay here three days!' cried Mr. Saville.

'Yes,' answered his son. 'I have been informed of your determination to deliver yourself into the hands of justice, and I have agreed to help my mother to frustrate your design, which is little short of madness. You shall not, if I can possibly help it, appear at the Old Bailey. I have too much regard for you and the honour of the family to permit you to ruin us all.'

‘You talk about the honour of the family—how much have you done to maintain it?’ queried Mr. Saville sarcastically.

‘Never mind. If I do not respect it in my own proper person, I may in yours,’ returned Michael. ‘And I tell you, once for all, that you shall not return to town. I do not wish to do you any harm, but simply to save you from yourself. You will thank me for what I am now doing some day.’

‘That is a matter of opinion. I can now see why your mother fabricated a letter from Felicia, and why she induced me to visit this place. How obtuse of me not to have penetrated her designs!’

He was silent, and leaning against a lamp-post appeared plunged in meditation.

Michael did not attempt to interrupt him.

Raising his head, Mr. Saville exclaimed :

‘And now you have thrown off the mask! Pray, what means do you intend to adopt to compel me to stay here against my will? What is to prevent me from using my free agency and walking away from you to the railway-station?’

‘I can do one of two things.’

‘Let me hear it, by all means,’ replied Mr. Saville, in the voice of a man who is rather amused than otherwise.

It was evident from his unconcerned manner that he did not for a moment believe Michael had the power or the ability to keep him in Bath.

‘It is open and permissible for me to take you to an hotel and declare that you are mad, and that I am your keeper, or what the Chancery Courts call your “committee.” Your violence, however great, would not avail you, for I have carefully

prepared documents in my pocket, with the aid of which I should have no difficulty whatever in convincing people of your insanity.'

The documents to which Michael alluded had no existence in fact, but it answered his purpose to say that he had them about him, and he did not scruple to make use of the weapon, however innocuous it would prove if put to the test.

'Don't you think you are a pretty scoundrel?' cried Mr. Saville, whose countenance changed a little. 'Are you not ashamed of your share in this deep-laid conspiracy?'

'Not at all. In my opinion the artifice is admirable, for anything is better than permitting you to ruin the family and imprison yourself for life.'

'That is your first plan. Tell me your second.'

'With pleasure. I will do so in the sincere hope that the revelation of the undeniable power I have over you will have weight enough with you to induce you to submit quietly. You shall be comfortable enough down here, I promise you. You shall have nothing to complain of. If you refuse to listen to reason, I have only to raise my voice, call a policeman, declare that you are a skittle-sharper, and that you have robbed me!'

'*I robbed you?*' said Mr. Saville, intensely astonished.

The good man forgot all about the watch and purse that Michael had given him.

'Yes. Now, I offer you peace or war. Which will you have? Which is it to be?'

'War—war to the knife! I must return to town, and you shall not prevent me.'

‘That is your final determination, fixed and irrevocable?’

‘It is.’

‘Think well, for I do not want to do anything in a hurry.’

‘I am wasting time in talking to you,’ replied Mr. Saville, with a gesture of impatience. ‘You are a silly boy, and delude yourself frightfully in thinking that you can coerce me.’

‘Silly boy or not,’ said Michael, ‘you will find that I can tie a weight to your leg which will prevent your going to London!’

Mr. Saville began to walk away.

Running to the door of the police-station, Michael Saville cried out ‘Police! police!’ at the top of his voice.

On hearing his son’s voice Mr. Saville changed his pace from a walk to a run, and foolishly endeavoured to get away from the spot.

Four men in uniform rushed out of the station and looked inquiringly at Michael, who pointed to the retreating figure of his father, saying:

‘There he is! Run after him, he has robbed me! Stop thief! Stop thief!’

Without waiting to hear another word the constables set off in pursuit of Mr. Saville, accompanied by Michael, and an animated chase began.

There seemed little chance of the poor gentleman effecting his escape.

Michael chuckled inwardly at the probable success of his simple but clever scheme.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

MICHAEL had endeavoured to persuade himself that he was acting a filial part in thus persecuting his father ; for his mother had hinted at the most terrible consequences if he were permitted to persist in his rash determination, which was so utterly and absurdly Quixotic as to warrant the belief that his senses were not so much under his absolute control as they should be.

And yet this conclusion may be erroneous.

How many instances of criminals brought to their knees by the voice of conscience and the action of remorse does not the history of crime afford ! Even of late years we have had men of wealth, position, and high rank, impeaching themselves, placing the heavy gyves around their limbs, and dooming themselves to a life of infinite misery, terminating only when death steps in to end their grief, and the grave affords them that rest which they never could find on earth.

The police, who were in chase of Mr. Saville, speedily overtook and collared him, much to his disgust. He struggled violently, and said,

‘Take your hands off ! I will not submit to this indignity in a public thoroughfare. I was running to catch my train.’

‘Take him to the station-house, and then search him,’ cried Michael, in a loud voice. ‘I charge him with having robbed me.’

‘It is false,’ said Mr. Saville, still unhappily oblivious of the fact that he had his son’s property in his possession.

Against his will, and in spite of his entreaties, he was dragged to the station-house with considerable violence.

The charge was taken. The lost property was described. Mr. Saville was searched, and the articles missing found upon him.

‘What have you to say, prisoner?’ inquired the inspector, with a cold, cynical look.

‘Why, he’s my son, and he gave them to me to take care of for him. Who ever heard of a father robbing his own son? The idea is preposterously absurd!’

With a smile of incredulity the inspector, on hearing this declaration, looked inquiringly at Michael, who immediately, with the utmost promptness, replied :

‘It is a clever idea, but utterly without foundation. The man is not my father. I have only known him a few hours, and he took advantage of our being together to rob me.’

After this the case was considered proved, and Mr. Saville was told that he must be locked up in the cells until the next morning, when he would be taken before the magistrates at the Town Hall.

He beckoned to Michael, who approached him.

‘You have conquered so far,’ he said in a whisper ; ‘but you cannot defeat my object. I can make my confession to any of these men, and it will, I daresay, serve Francis Barclay’s turn as well as if I were personally in the court.’

Michael said nothing, and his father was taken away.

He was forced to confess that, although he had succeeded in preventing his father from going to London, he had not attained the object he had in

view, and he cast about in his mind for some means of so effecting his end that it should be infallible. Mr. Saville was not in the least dismayed or cast down.

He knew the designs of his enemies, of which he had formerly been in ignorance, and instead of finding his burden more than he could bear, he took heart of grace, and was more fully determined than ever to do Francis Barclay justice.

He sent for the inspector after he had been shut up a couple of hours, and asked if bail would be taken. The answer was in the affirmative.

He was informed that one surety of a hundred would be sufficient.

On hearing this he sent a note to his daughter, who at once waited upon him.

She was overwhelmed with surprise at seeing the condition in which he was; but she was able to accomplish the object her father had in view through the instrumentality of Dr. Masterman Hall, who, in obedience to Felicia's request, at once put in the required bail, and Mr. Saville left the police-station with his friends.

Felicia wished to take her father to her house, he wishing, on the other hand, to return at once to town; but Dr. Hall suggested that he should stay a night and a day at his house, where no one would think of looking for him.

After some discussion this offer was eventually accepted, and Mr. Saville, taking leave of his daughter, accompanied the doctor to his house, where he was made very welcome.

Dr. Masterman Hall had no family, and was as good-natured an old bachelor as could be found in the British Islands.

He had a dispensing department, or 'druggery,' as it may not inaptly be called. Into this he took Mr. Saville after dinner. He had some drugs to prepare. He had given his assistant a holiday, and he did not like to leave his guest alone.

When he was engaged in pounding some alum, with his shirt-sleeves turned up and his coat off, a knock came at the private door, and Dr. Hall requested Mr. Saville to reply to the summons, which he did.

At first he could see nobody, but stepping into the street, he perceived a man, who seized him by the arm, exclaiming :

'You *must* come! We want you! Don't holler, because if you do it'll be the worse for you. We owe you some money. I know you don't come for nothing. You're a rich man's doctor, and not the poor's friend; but we want you, and you're bound to come!'

Mr. Saville was dragged rapidly along, in spite of his remonstrances to the effect that the man was mistaken, that he was not a doctor, and that if he were dragged to a patient he could be of no earthly use.

His captor declared that he knew better than that, and finding remonstrances of no more avail than struggling, Mr. Saville gave himself up to his fate, and proceeded quietly, not altogether destitute of a little curiosity.

He had the satisfaction of thinking that it was not the device of his son to get him once more into his power. The night was dark as pitch. There were few people about in the streets, upon the stones of which the street-lamps cast a ruddy and fitful glare.

The man, who continued to hold Mr. Saville's arm with a grip so tight as to be positively painful, led the way through an infinity of small and narrow streets, all of which were still and quiet.

He appeared to be making for the river Avon, which is a small and sluggish stream, scarcely worthy the name of a river.

Its banks are for the most part fringed with stumpy pollard willows, and all along its circuitous course of about three miles, which is its entire navigable distance, it is utterly devoid of one single atom of picturesque beauty, and unredeemed by the remotest approach to rustic adornment.

On reaching the river the man sprang into a boat, compelling Mr. Saville to follow him, and, seizing the sculls, propelled the little craft into the centre of the stream, after which he laid himself down to his work, and sculled rapidly in the direction of Berthampton.

When he had travelled about a mile he relaxed his efforts, and rowing in to shore, secured his boat to the stump of a tree, and, having landed, led the bank manager, whom he had so singularly mistaken for a doctor, in the direction of a small cottage situated amidst a group of trees. Lights glimmered from a window, and voices might have been heard conversing in a subdued strain.

Mr. Saville continued to submit to his fate with all the docile, spaniel-like passivity of an Oriental.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GOOD NEWS.

VERY little delay occurred in admitting Mr. Sandford Saville to the old house to which he had been brought in the highly remarkable manner which was fully detailed in the last chapter, and what little delay there was arose chiefly through a necessity which existed for shooting back some heavy and ponderous bolts which precluded the entrance of strangers.

The house, or, more strictly speaking, the cottage, consisted of four rooms—two up-stairs and two on the ground floor. It was comfortably, if poorly, furnished. There was certainly nothing about it to indicate that the occupants were living in abject poverty. They appeared to be possessed of a moderate competence, which, by the exercise of frugality, was sufficient for all their wants.

The man who had conducted Mr. Saville to the door led him at once up-stairs, finally ushering him into a bedroom, the principal article of furniture in which was a very large, old-fashioned, Arabian four-post bedstead, upon which lay the body of an old man.

There were no curtains to the bed, so that it was easy to look upon the old man's features. This was the patient of the supposed doctor. He did not bear any of the appearances of a long and painful illness. There was a look of care and harassment about his face, which was not in any way emaciated. His white hair was cut very short, what there was of it lying submissively upon a head which was already flecked with round or

jagged patches of baldness. His eyes rolled wildly, and his hands clenched and unclenched themselves in a vicious manner, while his lips—thin, parched, and fevered lips—were continually unclosing themselves as if the old man was in the habit of holding spasmodic conversations with himself, which to the casual listener were little better than a string of incoherent sentences, to which no particular meaning could be attached by the rational mind.

Altogether there was an air of unrest about this man. Mr. Sandford Saville gazed upon him for some few seconds, wondering whether he was the victim of insanity or simply the sport of a fever which had plunged him into the weird and seething vortex of delirium, and it was not until his conductor spoke that he perceived that he was not alone with the sick man.

‘Here’s the doctor! I’ve had hard work to get him, I can tell you!’ cried the individual who had by virtue of superior strength and indomitable resolution captured Mr. Saville in the streets of Bath. ‘Now he’s here, you had better make the most of him!’

A young lady rose from a chair upon hearing these words.

She was young, pretty, and elegant, though inexpensively clad; what she wore was, however, tastefully chosen, neatly put together, and indicative of a refined mind and a cultivated taste.

Apparently she was not more than nineteen years of age. Her hair and her complexion were dark as the night. Her figure was as symmetrical as that of a statue executed by a master-hand. Her voice was soft, dulcet, and well modulated.

‘Go down-stairs, Golah!’ she exclaimed.

Then turning to Mr. Saville, as the man sullenly obeyed her mandate, she added:

‘I must apologise for any rudeness of which our servant may have been guilty, sir; he is rough and unpolished, but good at heart. He has been with us for many years, and was a favourite servant of my poor father, when we were much better off than we are now.’

She glanced round the apartment in a sorrowful rather than a dissatisfied manner.

‘My father, sir,’ she resumed almost instantly, ‘is sadly in want of the kind services of a doctor. We are poor, and Golah, who was sent for you, was afraid that you would not come until he had paid you an extravagant fee, and, though you may be surprised at such a declaration, his fear was not ungrounded, for we have sent to three doctors in this neighbourhood, and not one would come unless he was paid previously. So I beg you will pardon any rudeness to which the eccentricity of Golah may have exposed you.’

‘Pray do not apologise to me, my dear young lady,’ replied Mr. Saville. ‘I ought to make an apology to you.’

‘For what?’ she inquired, raising her full lustrous eyes to the level of his countenance.

‘Because to a certain extent I am an impostor.’

‘An impostor?’

‘Yes.’

‘Please have the goodness to explain what I must confess is to me a riddle,’ she said, with startled vehemence.

‘I am not a doctor at all,’ replied Mr. Saville.

‘Why, then, are you here?’

‘Ask your servant.’

‘O, I see how it is. He has once more committed one of those blunders for which he is famous. I could laugh if I were not too much concerned for my father’s health. O sir, if you only knew how anxious I am about the poor dear old man!’

‘Permit me to explain in a few words how I came to be brought hither,’ exclaimed Mr. Saville.

The young lady made an inclination of the head in token of assent.

‘Your servant knocked at Dr. Masterman Hall’s surgery door. I had been dining with the doctor, who was then busy in preparing some medicine. His assistant having gone out, and hearing a knock, I was requested to answer the summons, which I did. What was my surprise to find myself violently seized, dragged into the street, and told that if I did not go willingly in any direction my captor chose to take me, I should be compelled to! This peremptory command was to me unpleasant in the extreme, but I expostulated in vain. My statement of the truth was laughed at as an excuse, and there was nothing for me to do but to submit. I am excessively sorry that I should have raised hopes in your breast which it is altogether out of my power to realise, but I will do the only thing that lies in my power.’

‘And that is?’

‘Simply this. I will go back to Dr. Hall, and request him, as a personal favour, to visit your house without delay.’

‘Thanks! thanks!’ she cried, as her eyes filled

with tears caused by grateful emotion. 'You are very kind.'

At this moment, when Mr. Saville was preparing to take his leave, the sick man moved uneasily, and made some observation in a louder tone than usual.

'Hush!' exclaimed the young lady. 'My father speaks!'

She laid her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence, after the most approved fashion of those who nurse invalids, and, going to the bedside, listened for some time. Then she came back to that part of the room in which Mr. Saville was standing, and said,

'I am really ashamed to ask any favour of you after the annoyance you have experienced, but my father has taken it into his head that you are a doctor, and he wishes to speak to you.'

'Tell me what is the matter with him, so that I may have some guide by the aid of which to shape my conversation,' said Mr. Saville, 'and I will cheerfully converse with him.'

'He has no disease,' replied the daughter—'that is to say, he has no radical complaint. He has always been very nervous and irritable, and a day or two since we received news from London which had been sedulously kept from us until the very last moment.'

'Indeed!'

'This news paralysed my father.'

'What may have been its import?'

'I have a brother, sir,' replied the young lady, 'and we were all very proud of him. We all loved him, and it was with extreme regret that we parted with him when he went to London.'

‘In what capacity?’

‘As a clerk in a bank.’

‘In a bank?’ repeated Mr. Saville abstractedly.

‘Unhappily, yes. My brother married a dear, good girl—a schoolfellow of my own, who has made him a devoted, attentive, and loving wife ever since their union, and who is a worthy mother of his children. Well, sir, it appears from what we have heard that my brother was induced in an evil hour to appropriate what did not belong to him—at least, that is the common report, though nothing in the world will ever induce me to believe it. I am his sister, sir, and though everything is so black against him, may be pardoned for being prejudiced in his favour.’

‘Pardon me!’ interrupted Mr. Sandford Saville, manager of the Royal Bubble Bank, ‘but will you allow me to sit down? I—I feel a little faint!’

Permission was, as a matter of course, at once and graciously accorded him.

He sat down, and allowing his head to fall back upon the cushion of the chair, fixed his eyes, which he had until now averted, full upon the young lady.

‘The accusation against my brother is this,’ she continued: ‘they say he robbed the bank in which he was a clerk, and appropriated some thousands of pounds to his own use. Yet he was ever a frugal man, and lived within his means. I am positive that he is the scapegoat of the real offender. But what has prostrated my father is the fact that he is to be tried to-morrow morning, and the solicitor engaged for the defence holds out no hopes of an acquittal. It is awful to have one’s innocent brother convicted and sent to gaol! O, I have loved

him very much, and he has been so good to us. Our means are limited now, and we have been glad to accept a small sum every month from him, and heaven knows that he has sent it willingly enough. Heaven bless him, and see him well out of his trouble!

Again those loquacious eyes, which were raised supplicatingly towards the dusky ceiling, filled with tears as a pious ejaculation escaped her lips.

‘I am afraid I trouble you with an exposition of our family affairs, which cannot be supposed to interest you,’ she said.

‘Not at all,’ replied Mr. Saville. ‘May I ask you a question?’

‘Certainly.’

‘In what bank was your brother employed?’

‘The Royal Bubble Bank.’

‘And his name?’

‘Frank—that is, Francis Barclay.’

‘Great heaven!’ cried the wretched man. ‘How strange and inscrutable are thy ways! This, looked upon as a manifestation of Divine Providence, is indeed wonderful—truly marvelous!’

Agnes Barclay, the sister of the young man who was languishing in prison for another’s crime, was at a loss to place a correct interpretation upon Mr. Saville’s eccentric conduct.

Some minutes elapsed, during which she regarded him curiously.

The silence was broken by the bank manager, who got up and said,

‘I will talk to your father with great pleasure. I have something to say which may lighten his mind of the heavy load which now lies upon it.’

‘If you do that, you will be a skilful magician,’ replied Agnes Barclay, with a sickly smile.

‘You must not despair until I have made the attempt.’

‘Shall I leave the room?’

‘By no means. I would rather you stayed here.’

Agnes remained after hearing this openly expressed wish of Mr. Saville, who went to the bedside, and looking the old man full in the face, exclaimed:

‘I bring you news of your son.’

This speech, brief though it was, had the effect of an electric shock upon the sensitive nerves of old Mr. Barclay.

‘My son! my son!’ he exclaimed, terribly excited. ‘What of him? Have they condemned him, hanged him, or caged him up in gaol for life?’

‘Calm yourself, my dear sir,’ said Mr. Saville soothingly, ‘and I will tell you all I know.’

‘Calm! How can you expect me to be calm? He is my only son. His mother loved him, and bade me mind and see to him; ’twas her request upon her death-bed! And I—how have I kept my promise to my wife? He was the prop of my old age, and now—now he is but one stage removed from a felon. A *felon*! Do you hear that? It is driving me mad! I candidly confess it, when the news of his conviction reaches me, I shall part with my senses for ever!’

‘Pray be calm!’ urged Mr. Saville.

‘Do—do endeavour to control yourself, dear father!’ pleaded Agnes.

‘How can I, my girl? How is it possible?’

replied the old man vehemently. 'Have I not told you that Frank is to be tried to-morrow for robbery, and that our name will be disgraced for ever, while it is problematical whether we ever see him again, except in a convict's dress? I loved the boy with all my heart, and is not this heavy shame in my old age enough to crush me? Heaven knows it is!'

There was a pause.

The old man fell back exhausted, and neither Agnes Barclay nor Mr. Saville thought fit to break the silence until the father of the family spoke again, which he shortly did.

'Did you not say you could tell me something about my unhappy son? I have suffered myself to be led away by my feelings, and I had forgotten your remark. Let me hear what you have to say.'

'You must not agitate yourself. Mine is good news,' said Mr. Saville.

'Why, of course it is, or you would not communicate it to me. I am too ill to hear bad tidings. I understand human nature a little, you see, and the motives by which men are swayed.'

'Your son is innocent of the charge brought against him!' cried Mr. Sandford Saville abruptly.

'I have always thought so,' said the old man. 'But who is to prove it?'

'I can.'

'You?'

'Yes.'

'Who are you?' inquired old Mr. Barclay. 'Tell me who you are, sir. You have saved my life. I should have grieved myself into a mortal sorrow which would have hurried me into my

grave. Let me grasp your hand! You are a fine fellow! Give me your hand, I say! I like to shake hands with an honest man!"

It was evident to the meanest comprehension that Mr. Barclay was not only unusually but painfully excited.

Agnes was slightly alarmed when she saw her father sink back upon the supporting pillows and gasp for breath, as if he had made too great a demand upon the little store of strength which remained to him.

'Do not trifle with my father's feelings, sir,' she said, with a supplicating look at the bank manager. 'You are a stranger to us. You were brought here accidentally, and it seems incredible to me that you can know anything about our family affairs.'

'I do, I assure you. I am not trifling with you,' responded Mr. Saville.

'His hand! I want his hand! Let me shake him by the hand!' said Mr. Barclay impatiently.

The bank manager held back.

'Give my father your hand, sir!' pleaded Agnes.

'I cannot.'

'Why?'

'It is not the hand of an honest man.'

'What do you say?' she demanded, in surprise.

'I am a villain, and I am not worthy of the honour your brave old father proposes to confer upon me!' replied Mr. Saville boldly.

He had embarked upon the right course, and he felt that he ought to allow nothing to stop his progress.

‘What’s he saying, Aggy?’ inquired the old man. ‘Why don’t he give me his hand? I don’t understand all this. Is he telling me lies to comfort me?’

‘No, I am not!’ exclaimed Mr. Saville. ‘When I told you that your son was innocent, I told you the truth. I can prove his innocence, and by heaven’s help I will!’

‘You?’ said the old man, regarding him steadfastly.

‘Who are you?’ inquired Aggy wonderingly. ‘Let me know your name, and what position you hold in society, so that I may form my own opinion upon what you have told us.’

Allowing his head to droop a little, Mr. Saville replied, in a low but distinct voice:

‘I am Sandford Saville, the manager of the Royal Bubble Bank, and the per—that is to say, the only person in England able to save your son.’

At this declaration both father and daughter regarded their visitor with great curiosity.

Their hearts were leaping wildly within them, and they were hardly able to believe the good news which had been brought them by one of the purest accidents that ever happened since the world was created.

Mr. Saville was sadly quiescent, and fully prepared to go through with the arduous task he had undertaken.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REPARATION.

To a man in Mr. Sandford Saville's frame of mind the finger of Providence was clearly traceable in what had recently taken place.

He extended his hand and caught that of the old man in a firm grasp, exclaiming as he did so,

'Do not distress yourself. Your son shall not suffer. He is unjustly accused! Listen to me: *I am the real culprit!*'

'*You!* Do you hear that, Agnes? Do you hear that?' cried the old man, with great vehemence. 'Send for a policeman! He acquits Frank, and says he is the real culprit! Say that again, sir! I am afraid Agnes did not hear it! Say it again!'

'I will willingly repeat it, if it is likely to give you any consolation,' replied Mr. Saville; 'but to send for a policeman is totally unnecessary. I did not come to Bath to avoid appearing at your son's trial. Family matters brought me here. I had fully made up my mind to return to town to-morrow, so as to be at the Old Bailey in time, and since events have multiplied, and the acts in the drama have developed themselves, I have a proposition to make.'

'What is it?'

'If you feel yourself well enough to-morrow, will you come to town with me and assist at your son's liberation?'

'It will amount to this, then,' said Mr. Barclay: 'that you will confess, and procure my son's liberation at the sacrifice of your own freedom.'

‘Precisely so.’

‘And you are prepared to do that?’

‘I have been prepared all along. I was induced to commit the crime with which your son stands charged through the blandishments and incessant persecution of my wife. I was sorry for it afterwards, and I will gladly pass the remainder of my life in prison if I can succeed in doing Francis Barclay tardy justice, and save him from the doom which should be mine, and mine alone.’

‘That is very noble of you—very noble indeed!’ replied Mr. Barclay; ‘but allow me to say that it is rather too noble, if you can comprehend my meaning. I am better already. I could not bear to think my son a thief, and to fancy that he would herd with felons and wear the dress of a convict. We are proud if we are poor. I think I shall be able to get up to-morrow and accompany you to London as you request; but in the mean time you must pardon the solicitude of a father if I ask you to permit yourself to be put under restraint.’

‘In what way do you mean?’

‘You must stay here.’

‘Must?’

‘Excuse me for speaking in the imperative mood, but my mind is disturbed, and I do not make use of that urbane language upon the employment of which I generally plume myself. I look upon you as the key which is to open my son’s prison and restore him to the companionship of his fellow-men once more. You are valuable to me—of the very highest value—and I cannot afford to lose sight of you.’

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Saville, with an air of

Christian resignation, 'I submit to the terms you impose upon me, which after all are not very hard. Perhaps I shall meet with harsher treatment before many days have passed over my head.'

'All I ask is that you will allow yourself to be locked in a bedroom which I shall offer you,' said Mr. Barclay.

'Do so, by all means. I have no wish to evade the penalty of the crime which I have avowed. My only object in denouncing myself was to insure justice to Francis Barclay. I must be locked up sooner or later, and it does not matter to me whether I am locked up now or a week hence.'

A voice whispered in his ear that he was doing wrong in dooming his family to a life of disgrace and perhaps penury. Felicia was in a fair way to make an advantageous marriage. Was it not the height of turpitude to blight her happiness or her future by proclaiming himself a man of infamous character? His mind was tempest-tossed, and he knew not what to do. His mother's careful tuition when he was a child had impressed the broad precepts of God's laws upon his infant mind, and by those precepts he determined to be guided. He had done wrong, therefore it was his duty to make reparation. What reparation could he make if he neglected to vindicate Francis Barclay's honour and procure him a pardon?

The morning came at last, and Mr. Barclay was sufficiently recovered to be able to rise and undertake the journey to London which was to liberate his son. He imbibed quite an affection for Mr. Saville, and held him tightly by the arm, as if he had been his dearest friend.

A little party, consisting of the father, the

daughter, and the bank manager, was made up, and the component parts of it sought the railway-station together. They did not converse much. All were engrossed with their own thoughts.

A morning paper which Mr. Barclay procured informed them that the trial of Francis Barclay was expected to take place that day, but as the evidence was so clear and conclusive it was not expected to last long. The paper, without wishing to bias the minds of either the jurors or its readers, was strongly of opinion that a verdict of guilty would inevitably be returned without much discussion. 'We hear,' added the report, 'that the prisoner has declined the assistance of counsel, having elected to make his own defence.' This intelligence strongly excited Mr. Barclay, who commented upon it in a rapid manner as the train glided from station to station on its way to London. His great fear was that he should not be able to arrive in time to save his son from the condemnatory verdict of a dozen jurymen who were sure to be prejudiced against him.

There was some ground for his apprehension. The train had not gone more than forty miles before the piston-rod of the engine broke, and it came to an abrupt and ignominious stop. The passengers were requested to alight, which they did with alacrity. The guards ran frantically down the line to stop those trains that might be advancing, and one of the enginemen went to the nearest station, which was not more than five miles off, to telegraph for another engine. Some time had to elapse, however, before this much desired assistance could arrive, and the passengers were left fuming and fretting upon the embank-

ment, unable to help themselves, their only consolation being a hope that the lawyers would enable them to obtain heavy damages from the company for so untimely and unpleasant a breakdown as the one which had befallen them.

Mr. Barclay was especially furious. His rage knew no bounds. His anger was uncontrollable. He raved and swore until he made himself ill.

Sandford Saville was quiet and hopeful. He said nothing, and waited the course of events. He felt completely crushed. There was a weight upon his mind which he could not remove. He wished ardently for a prison, in whose gloomy depths he might, by a life of prayer, atone for the misdeeds of the past. Hard labour did not dismay him with its near prospect: he thought it would be an expiatory sacrifice to blot out his sin.

For a long time the broken-down train waited, and no help was forthcoming. It seemed extremely likely that the passengers would be obliged to tramp across the country and find a temporary refuge in an adjacent village. Mr. Barclay threw himself passionately upon the greensward, and exclaimed in agony-laden accents,

‘My son, my son, heaven deliver thee!’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CRISIS.

THE Linstock blood was flowing in Valentine Bridgeman’s veins with all the vigour of its hereditary force. His father had been extravagant before him, and, indeed, had set him an example

which he was not slow to follow. His father's death, instead of putting him in the possession of funds, gave him an impoverished title, a heavily-encumbered estate, and a load of debts which it was utterly out of his power to pay, and which in their magnitude absolutely dismayed him.

In this dilemma he looked around him, and thought of his friends. To go to the Jews for money was worse than useless, as all his landed property was mortgaged to its full value. Mr. Saville occurred to him, and he held a brief conversation with his mother respecting the bank manager and his family. They were sitting in a handsomely-furnished apartment at Hadlow Castle, the windows looking upon the moat and over the spacious park were open, and admitted the fragrant smell of heather and of hawthorn, which is so sweet to those who love nature in her wildest and most uncultivated efforts.

'You fully perceive, my dear Valentine,' exclaimed Lady Linstock, 'that we are in a terrible dilemma. While your father was a manager of so many of those odious City companies we could continue to keep up appearances and pay the interest on our loans; but now our condition is pitiable indeed. We must become the spoil of Israel if something is not done.'

'What in the world can we do unless we borrow some money?' said Valentine Lord Linstock, in great perplexity.

'That is it,' exclaimed his mother, in a tone of pleasure. 'You have touched the keynote. Your admirable sense has pointed out to you the only way in which we can possibly escape from our troubles.'

‘And that is by borrowing money?’

‘Undoubtedly. If you can suggest any other, I shall be happy to listen to you.’

‘From whom are we to borrow?’

‘Tax your memory and see if you cannot find one man or one woman who was much more attached to you than others.’

‘I cannot.’

‘That is strange. If you will not exercise your memory, I suppose I must suggest something to that obtuse faculty. What do you say to Mr. Saville?’

‘The bank manager?’

‘Yes.’

‘They want me to marry the daughter.’

‘I know they do.’

‘And would you have me contract such a *mésalliance*?’

‘Is it not better than a debtor’s prison?’ replied Lady Linstock, with the utmost calmness.

‘We are ruined. The girl is good-looking, and, I believe, of a generous and affectionate disposition. Her father is rich. Marry her.’

‘So soon after my father’s death?’

‘Of course not; but you can secretly pledge yourself. Organise a betrothal, as the Germans do, and on the strength of that borrow ten thousand pounds from old Saville. That will enable us to glide over a few months.’

‘I shall have to fulfil the engagement after all—that is, as a man of honour. I am not aware that the girl likes me, but I flatter myself that if I paid her any serious attention she would become reconciled to any defect I may have, either physical or moral; and I assure you, my dear mother, that

though I am not in the least conscientious, I do not care about breaking girls' hearts.'

'Who wants you to do anything of the sort?' inquired Lady Linstock, raising her eyebrows.

'You do.'

'I?'

'Certainly.'

'Not at all; you mistake me altogether. What I say is this: Make love to the girl, win her affections, and marry her.'

'You advise me to marry her?' ejaculated Valentine, in astonishment.

'I do. You are well bred, and consequently can afford to introduce a little base blood into the family. Marry Miss Saville, and, depend upon it, you will thank me for my advice. Anything is better than the miserable poverty which awaits us. If something is not done we must sell the few effects we have and go abroad. Possibly you might get employment on the staff in the Austrian army.'

Valentine thought for a little time, and at length consented to fall in with his mother's far-sighted views. He paid Mrs. Sandford Saville a visit, who of course was delighted beyond measure to see the scion of a noble house whom she had made up her mind should be her daughter's husband. Mrs. Saville was dressed as if she were going out, and so, in fact, she was. The voice of curiosity called her to the Old Bailey—not the voice of conscience or of duty—they were for the present dumb. She wished to hear Francis Barclay condemned, and to make sure that what Michael had telegraphed to her at Bath was true, and that the bank manager was far from the Central

Criminal Court. Yet she stayed awhile to hold sweet counsel with Valentine, whom she addressed by his newly-acquired title with more frequency than good breeding justified. Perhaps she liked the sound of it, and was merely practising against the time when she could proudly allude to her daughter Lady or her son-in-law Lord Linstock.

‘I have called to wish you good-bye, Mrs. Saville,’ exclaimed Valentine.

‘Good-bye!’ she echoed, in astonishment.

‘Yes. I am going away for some little time. In fact, a little disagreement has sprung up between my mother and myself. You are so old a friend that I do not mind letting you into the secret. All my father’s personalty goes to my mother, and the Linstock property is mortgaged. My affairs are involved, and I will not consent to a further encumbrance of the estate. I have put the matter into the hands of an agent who is thoroughly trustworthy, and in whose integrity I would confide my life. If I am absent, say three, six, or twelve months, he will put my affairs in order, and I shall be able to go about the streets of London without fear of arrest.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mrs. Saville, who was very much surprised to hear all this. ‘I had no idea of this—not the slightest conception! Will not your mother assist you, Lord Linstock?’

‘She will not. At her death she has promised me everything; indeed, I believe it will revert to me by the provisions of the will. But enough of this sort of conversation, which I could not expect you to understand,’ said Valentine, hastily changing the subject. ‘Permit me to inquire after your charming daughter.’

A flush of pleasure reddened Mrs. Saville's ordinarily pale cheek as she replied :

'Thanks ! She is slightly better.'

'Better ! I was not aware that she had been indisposed.'

'For a short time. She is now at Bath.'

'I could have wished to see her. May I speak as plainly to you, my dear Mrs. Saville, without giving offence, as I should have spoken to Felicia if she had been here ?'

'He calls her by her Christian name,' murmured Mrs. Saville, whose heart beat tumultuously in her breast.

'Certainly,' she replied aloud. 'Say what you like. Do not make a stranger of me. What the daughter may hear without shame, surely the mother may, Lord Linstock.'

'I will throw myself upon your generosity,' said Valentine. 'I have long admired your daughter, and if I thought that my affection for her was reciprocated I would willingly make her my wife, but not otherwise. Never would I espouse a girl who loved another and only united her fate with mine through constraint or the promptings of ambition.'

'I can set your mind at rest upon that point, my lord,' said Mrs. Saville, with a highly gratified smile. 'Felicia loves no one but yourself: she has told me more than once, in one of those moments of confidence which occasionally happen between mother and daughter, that she was in love with you.'

'That declaration removes the only obstacle to a proposal from me,' said Valentine. 'How tiresome it is that my creditors are so pressing, and

compel me to go abroad! I shall not have an opportunity of expressing my sentiments to your daughter for some time to come, and during that time she may prove false to the old love, and see some one she likes better than myself. I may be wrong, but fashionable young ladies are always more or less fickle.'

'How much do you imagine would enable you to stay here?' inquired Mrs. Saville.

Lord Linstock smiled inwardly. The conversation was taking the turn he wished it to.

'A small matter of ten thousand,' he replied.

'Ten thousand pounds!' she repeated abstractedly.

'Yes,' said Lord Linstock, stroking his light moustache with complacency.

'If I might venture so far without offending your lordship,' said Mrs. Saville, 'I would propose to make you a present of this sum. Let us consider it part of the dowry which Mr. Saville—who is unfortunately from home—such bad health, you know, poor dear fellow—will feel it his imperative duty to give Felicia when she leaves her home for ever.'

'Very kind. 'Pon my word, don't know what to say. Quite overwhelmed,' muttered Lord Linstock.

'You will accept my offer. You must indeed; I insist upon it. I will take no denial,' cried Mrs. Saville eagerly.

Lord Linstock continued his feeble protestations that he could not hear of such a thing, and that nothing should induce him to accept so large a sum of money. During his remonstrances and half-hearted denials, Mrs. Saville ran to a bureau,

and, unlocking it with a key of singular make, took from a secret drawer some of the identical notes of which Sandford Saville had at her dictation robbed the Royal Bubble Bank. She counted them rapidly, and having got together the required amount, handed them to Lord Linstock, who took them with protestations of gratitude, saying: 'This generosity, Mrs. Saville, is quite regal. I do not know how to thank you.'

'Come often and see us, pay your respects to Felicia, and arrange everything, so that you can be married as soon as you are out of mourning for your father,' replied Mrs. Saville, who thought such a son-in-law cheaply purchased at the price of ten thousand pounds.

Valentine shook hands with Mrs. Saville, promised compliance with all her demands, and took his leave, vastly pleased to think that he had succeeded in borrowing a sum of money which just then would be of the greatest use to his mother and himself.

As he passed into the street, and was walking leisurely along in the direction of Mayfair, a strange man accosted him. Valentine was unacquainted with his features, but it was no other than Zadok Hoskisson, who took such an interest in the fate of Francis Barclay, and who had so terrified Mr. and Mrs. Saville by his untimely appearance on the night of the ball.

'I beg your pardon, my lord. I am a stranger to you; but if you will kindly grant me a few minutes' conversation—'

'Not now, my good fellow, some other time. You seem to know my name; call upon me at my house,' replied Valentine, in a hurry.

‘It is better now.’

‘I tell you no.’

‘I wish to put you on your guard against Mrs. Saville,’ said Zadok. ‘It is best that you should listen to me ; I will not keep you long.’

‘Say what you have to say quickly,’ cried Valentine, changing his mind.

‘That woman is a demon incarnate. She is worming herself into good society under false colours. I will expose her. Every one who has been in Australia knows that—’

‘Do come to the point, my good fellow,’ said Valentine angrily. ‘I have neither time nor inclination to stand here listening to a long rigmarole of which it is impossible to make head or tail.’

Zadok Hoskisson appeared undecided what to do.

Looking at his watch, Valentine said : ‘It is now nearly three, and I want to get to the Old Bailey as fast as possible.’

‘Indeed ! That is the direction in which I shall bend my steps. Why do you go ?’

‘That is no business of yours,’ returned Lord Linstock haughtily.

‘Shall I tell your lordship why you are going to the Old Bailey ? To hear the trial of a young man who is to be tried for breaking into a bank, of which your father, the late lord, was chairman, but who is as innocent of the offence as—’

‘Yes, yes, I daresay. Good-morning. If you have anything to say about Mrs. Saville, put it in writing. Good-morning !’

He nodded his head, and went away, leaving Zadok in a brown study.

‘I feel,’ he said, ‘that events are coming to a crisis.’

Almost all the personages in this story seemed to be concentrating in and around the Old Bailey. Mr. Saville and old Mr. Barclay, together with his daughter, were making frantic efforts to arrive before the verdict was given. Mrs. Saville was going deeply veiled. Zadok Hoskisson was also hastening thither, while even Lord Linstock could not repress some curiosity to see a trial which was likely to create a great deal of interest in the public mind.

A crisis of magnitude and importance was approaching in the fortunes of the house of Saville.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRIAL.

It was on a very hot day that Francis Barclay was brought up to the Old Bailey from the prison next door, in which he had languished for some time. He was glad that the time had arrived at which his counsel could state the case to the public, and do all in his power to procure the acquittal and liberation of his client from an irksome captivity. If he had been guilty of the crime laid to his charge he could have cheerfully resigned himself to his fate, but he was not guilty.

The tears forced themselves into his eyes as he thought of the melancholy prospect before him. The links in the chain of circumstantial evidence were undoubtedly well forged, and had been

twisted so tightly around him that he feared there was little or no chance of his escaping.

He had asked one or two officials in the prison of Newgate, where he had been confined, what the consequences of a conviction would be, and they had variously estimated the amount of punishment which he would receive at from fourteen to twenty years' penal servitude. Horrible thought! agonising reflection! To herd with felons—to mingle, if not to associate, with the vilest of the vile for twenty years—to be out of the world—to be shut up in a noisome cell or doomed to incessant drudgery! He felt maddened at the idea.

The counsel who had been retained to defend Francis Barclay was a man well known, and one worthily esteemed as an able and a clever man. He had been many years at the criminal bar, so that he had worked laboriously to acquire the position he held.

Serjeant Lancaster had been retained by the order of Zadok Hoskisson, who took the greatest interest in Barclay, and appeared to be desirous of doing all that lay in his power to procure his liberation and acquittal. It was indeed fortunate that his friend in need came forward, for Barclay was utterly unable to raise the one hundred pounds which was absolutely necessary for the purposes of the defence. Zadok gave Barclay's solicitor a *carte blanche* upon his purse, and desired that the unfortunate prisoner might be defended as well as money would enable him to be.

At eleven o'clock the two judges before whom the case was appointed to be tried took their seats upon the bench, and the prisoner was led into court by two officers and placed in the dock. He

placed his hands upon the rail, and looked unflinchingly at the vast concourse of people who thronged the crowded court. It was noticed that he was very pale, and seemed to have fretted very much during his incarceration; but it was also remarked that his eye did not quail nor the muscles of his face quiver as twice two hundred eyes were fixed upon him simultaneously.

A murmur of admiring commiseration ran through the court, which the ushers did not attempt to suppress. It evidenced the feeling of the crowd, which, its component members hardly knew why, was in favour of the prisoner.

The usual business was gone through by the clerk of the arraigns, and Francis Barclay was called upon to plead to the indictment.

In a clear voice he declared that he was not guilty—‘So help him, God!’

The counsel for the prosecution rose and made a very temperate speech, which had the effect of setting all the facts against the prisoner in damning array. Witnesses were called, and the business of condemning an innocent man fully gone into.

At half-past one the court rose for the purpose of obtaining a little refreshment, and every one who had the slightest knowledge of, or experience in, criminal cases came to the conclusion that nothing could save the prisoner from conviction. The odds were a hundred to one against him.

At twenty minutes to three Mr. Serjeant Lancaster rose for the defence. He made a long speech, and dwelt with great minuteness upon every little scrap of evidence which told in favour of his client.

Mr. Serjeant Lancaster was something more than eloquent. He understood his art to perfection, and he knew that nothing ought to be allowed to supersede nature. He endeavoured to touch the hearts of his audience by his emotional delivery.

He was fully conscious that one flash of passion upon the cheek, one beam of feeling from the eye, one thrilling note of sensibility from the tongue, one stroke of hearty emphasis from the arm, were worth a thousand studied sentences, pointed phrases, or skilfully-rounded commonplaces.

But he had to fight against facts. To do this is of all things the most arduous. No juryman can obliterate from his mind that it has been clearly proved that the prisoner was in such and such a place at such and such a time. Facts are stubborn things, and the counsel who can reason a juryman out of clearly substantiated facts must be a clever man indeed.

Mr. Serjeant Lancaster's speech was not without merit; for the jury did not at its conclusion return a verdict at once—they retired to their private room to deliberate.

At this moment Mrs. Sandford Saville entered the court. She had heavily bribed an officer, and was accommodated with a seat. Her eye wandered restlessly about, in order to perceive if her husband was anywhere concealed within its precincts. She could nowhere discover him. Before she was aware of the fact, Zadok Hoskisson had glided up to her side.

His face wore a sad and anxious expression.

'You here?' she exclaimed.

'I am here because duty calls me,' he replied, in a stern voice. 'I am convinced of the young

man's innocence, but I fear he will be convicted. If I were only a little more behind the scenes I believe I could lay my finger upon the true culprit.'

'As you are so anxious to save the young man,' she said, 'I wonder you do not volunteer a confession, and put yourself in his place!'

'Such a remark ill becomes you,' cried Zadok Hoskisson, with flashing eyes. 'Do you forget who and what you are? Are you oblivious of the fact that I could in a single moment—'

'Don't, don't, for heaven's sake!' exclaimed Mrs. Saville, in an agony of terror. 'Not now! Let us talk when we are alone and no one can hear us. I do not deserve this treatment at your hands. I have yielded willingly to your only openly expressed wish since your arrival in this country.'

'Well, well, I will wait; but mark my words—the denunciation must come. This prosecution, I feel assured, is your work.'

'Mine! You are very much mistaken. I give you my word—'

'*Your* word! Pish! it is not worth the utterance!' said Zadok Hoskisson contemptuously.

'Hush, hush! The jury are coming back!' exclaimed Mrs. Saville.

Almost identical with their entrance was that of the new Lord Linstock. He bowed to Mrs. Saville, and endeavoured to make his way to her, but he found such a proceeding utterly impossible. He was wedged in the crowd near the door, and there he was obliged to stay.

The jury walked quickly, as if they had come to a conclusion without much difficulty, and were glad that a disagreeable business was over, and that they would soon have an opportunity of re-

turning to their homes and their usual avocations.

The clerk put the question to them—that stereotyped question: ‘How find you, gentlemen?’ &c.

It was half-past five. The foreman of the jury leant over the box, and cleared his throat with a preliminary ‘Hem!’

He opened his mouth and was about to speak when a noise was heard at the entrance to the court. A struggle was taking place. Two men, as it appeared, were fighting the ushers, and sought admittance by the exercise of all their strength.

In vain silence was demanded. These two desperate men would not be silenced. They fought and battled like Saladin and his Saracens. In vain the judge interfered—in vain counsel rose and demanded silence.

One of the men was old. His gray hair was perceptible, and so were the wrinkles upon his brow. He was frantic, desperate, and determined. No power on earth could silence him as he cried out:

‘My son, my son! let me get to my son! I bring fresh evidence! He is not guilty! Let me pass, I say! Away there! Make way there, good people! Let me pass! I am the father of the accused. Let me go to my son!’

When this voice fell upon Francis Barclay’s ears he was truly astonished. He had come to the conclusion that the circumstantial evidence against him was so complete that there was no chance whatever of his escaping. But he was mistaken. He had thought so before the trial commenced, and he had requested his wife to stay

away from the court because he wished her to be spared the harrowing scene of a conviction of himself by those who were appointed to try him.

When the people heard that the violent old man who was pushing them about was the father of the accused, they made way for him with a willingness that was almost reverential. Every one was on the very tiptoe of expectation. Judge, jury, counsel, and those in the body of the court wondered what new phase the trial was about to assume.

Valentine Bridgeman, now Lord Linstock, was rather glad that he had taken the trouble to come down to the court. He rather liked excitement and anything of a sensational nature.

Mrs. Sandford Saville was strangely concerned. She dreaded the worst; her quick intuition advised her at once that Mr. Saville had broken away from the guardianship which Michael had telegraphed that he had established over him.

With some difficulty she contrived to raise a little ivory opera-glass to her eyes. Through this she looked at the seething heaving crowd at the entrance to the court, and with the utmost pain and consternation recognised her husband, who was slowly following old Mr. Barclay through a narrow lane which the spectators in the body of the court had with the greatest difficulty made to allow them to progress.

In a half-fainting condition she sank back in her seat, and was supported by Zadok Hoskisson, who smiled grimly. He had watched her craning her neck and looking eagerly over the people's heads. He had watched her narrowly as her cheek blanched, and her countenance fell when she re-

cognised her husband, and he gloated over her distress.

The first act of Mr. Barclay in the little drama in which he had just before its conclusion assumed a prominent part was to go up to the dock, stretch out his hand, and shake the tips of his son's fingers, saying, 'Keep up your courage, my boy. It will be all made clear presently. I have the real perpetrator of the robbery with me.'

Francis Barclay's eyes glistened with joy; his emotion for the time being deprived him of the power of speech.

Mr. Sandford Saville stepped forward, as prominently as he could, and exclaimed in a low but distinct voice:

'I wish, with the permission of the court, to say a few words—in point of fact, to make a statement incriminating myself.'

The judge ordered that he should be placed in the witness-box. The verdict had not yet been given, and such a course was permissible.

Amidst the most unparalleled commotion Mr. Saville was conducted by an officer of the court to the witness-box, but that did not satisfy him.

'I am not a witness,' he said, 'and I demand to be placed in the felon's dock, by the side of Francis Barclay.'

It was ruled, after some discussion, that his request could not be complied with until some evidence was submitted to the court which would justify his being placed in such a position. Consequently the bank manager was constrained to give his evidence in the witness-box.

'As what I am about to say,' he exclaimed, 'rather concerns the court than the gentlemen of

the jury, I shall address myself to your lordships. I am the manager of the Royal Bubble Bank, in which Francis Barclay was a clerk, and I beg to state that I, unaided, committed the robbery of which the aforementioned Francis Barclay stands accused. I therefore demand that he be released from custody, and that I may be placed before you on my own confession.'

A deafening cheer arose when the import of this speech was fully understood by the crowd. People shook hands with one another amidst the wildest demonstrations of delight.

Many questions were put to Mr. Sandford Saville, but he did not waver for a moment in his statement.

After a long deliberation it was agreed that Francis Barclay should be liberated if one security could be found to put in a bail of a thousand pounds. His father sighed when he heard this, because he saw that it was out of his power to comply with the requisition, and he was afraid that his son would have to go to prison.

He could not murmur at the decree, because Mr. Sandford Saville's statement was so singular, and, coming as it did at the last moment, was so romantic that the judges were justified in requiring him to come up for judgment if called upon, and in demanding bail for his appearance.

While Francis Barclay's friends were in a state of doubt, conjecture, and alarm, Zadok Hoskisson stepped up to the clerk of the court, and tendered his bail in a thousand pounds. He was questioned as to his means and to his residence. The only reply to these questions he condescended to make was to produce a pocket-book and take therefrom

notes to that amount, which he consented to deposit in the custody of the court. This was accepted, and Francis Barclay was provisionally liberated. Mr. Sandford Saville was fully committed to take his trial for the offence of which he had confessed himself the perpetrator, and the court adjourned after a very exciting sitting.

All the evening papers issued a special edition containing the remarkable confession of Mr. Sandford Saville, who had hitherto held a high position in the City, and to all appearances deserved the encomiums which had been heaped upon him by all those who knew him.

Lord Linstock was shocked beyond measure at the disgraceful revelation, and thanked his good fortune for not having contracted an alliance with Felicia Saville, which act would have made him the son-in-law of a felon.

He pressed up to Mrs. Saville in order to speak to her and give loud vent to his indignation, which as the court was breaking up rapidly he did not find so difficult to accomplish. When he reached her he saw her head fall back, her eyes close, and her mouth open. She had fainted!

Zadok Hoskisson also came to her assistance, and the two men vied with one another in their attentions to restore the lady to consciousness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STORY OF THE PAST.

MRS. SAVILLE was so dangerously unwell that it was found necessary to take her to the nearest

hotel and send for medical advice. She passed from one fainting fit into another, and appeared to be in a most evil case. To have removed her to her own house would have been hazardous, and Zadok Hoskisson took upon himself the responsibility of having her shifted to the nearest hostelry, where a doctor could attend her without delay.

She was ushered into a shabby room, laid, by the hands of strangers, upon an old-fashioned bedstead, which lacked the glory, the gilding, and the workmanship of her West End establishment. The furniture was ancient, and everything wore an air of a century ago, if not more.

Valentine could not help speaking; he looked upon Hoskisson as a friend of the Savilles, and he said bitterly, 'I have been sadly deceived in this family. I take the liberty of speaking to you, because I presume you are a friend of this lady, and I wish to talk to some one.'

'That you should have been deceived does not in the least surprise me,' said Hoskisson. 'Retire with me into a corner of the room while the doctor prescribes for his patient. I will enlighten you about the antecedents of Mrs. Saville.'

Valentine followed him as he requested, and when they were out of hearing of the doctor and the nurse, Zadok Hoskisson exclaimed:

'Listen to me, young man, and you will congratulate yourself a thousand times more when I have finished than you do at present. Anne Claverstoke, now Mrs. Saville, the woman lying on yonder bed, was originally a maid-servant in England. She committed a crime, for which she was transported. I, at that time, was a gaoler in a prison in Australia, to which she was sent.'

‘Great heavens!’ ejaculated Valentine.

‘She was very pretty,’ resumed Zadok, without heeding the interruption, ‘and I fell in love with my captive, with whom my duty necessitated frequent interviews. She so far played upon my feelings that I aided her to escape, and we fled together to the bush, where we lived as man and wife for some time.’

He paused, and uttered a sigh, as if the reminiscence affected, if it did not overcome, him.

‘So tame an existence, however, did not suit her. One night she took advantage of my being wrapped in a deep sleep, and stabbed me with a hunting-knife, the point of which was fortunately blunt. The wound was not mortal, and I recovered by the purest of chances. I found that she had fled, whither I knew not, but I determined to follow her to the end of the world before I would give up the chase. I did follow her, and found her in Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, where she had married a man highly respected. His name was Saville, the man whom her evil influence has just consigned to a prison.’

‘Is it possible?’

‘It is true. I forced my way into their house. I denounced Anne Claverstoke to her husband and her family, and vowed revenge. Her daughter was the most affected at the revelation. She was a girl of about twelve years of age, for you must bear in mind that it had taken me some time to discover the woman who had deceived and wronged me.’

‘Do you allude to Felicia?’

‘That, I believe, is her name. She is, and always was, a good girl, taking more after her

father than her mother. They eluded me again and came to England. A second time I had to hunt them down, which I only succeeded in doing a short time back, but now I am fully avenged. When I see the critical state in which she is—when I reflect upon the overwhelming ruin which has overtaken them—when I think that the family is annihilated—I can rest and say, “Zadok Hoskisson, thy labour has not been in vain!”

Valentine was astounded at the revelation which his new acquaintance had made; he had never anticipated anything so dreadful. He thought that it served him right for being on such an intimate footing with people of whom he knew nothing, and whose only recommendation was that the head of the family was in a position of trust in the City, and was reputed to be rich.

The doctor beckoned to Zadok, and when he approached, said,

‘My patient is a little better now. The hysterical feeling has passed away, and she is sensible. Do not excite her, but if you have anything particular to say to her, you have my permission to do so.’

Zadok replied that he did not wish to say anything just then.

Valentine, however, could not restrain himself. No sooner had he heard the words of the medical man than he went gently to the side of the bed upon which Mrs. Saville was lying, and exclaimed :

‘I do not wish to agitate you, Mrs. Saville; I only want to return the money you were kind enough to lend me this afternoon. Will you take it, or shall I pay it in to your bankers in your name?’

‘Do you turn away from me because my husband has gone mad?’ replied Mrs. Saville.

‘Not for that reason. Though you must allow me to say that I see no cause to doubt his sanity.’

‘Why then?’ she demanded, changing her former faint tone for one of asperity. ‘I tell you my husband is out of his mind. The jury would have found Francis Barclay guilty had he not interfered. I must take the opinion of a medical man as to his sanity. It is monstrous that I should be made to suffer in this dreadful way for no fault of my own. Why do you desert me?’

‘Let me refer you to this gentleman,’ answered Lord Linstock, pointing to Zadok Hoskisson.

‘You!’ cried Mrs. Saville, as Hoskisson stepped forward, emerging from the gloom which had enveloped him. ‘You! Viper—wretch—snake in the grass! You! low-bred wretch that you are! Why do you come here? O, that I had some weapon with which I could annihilate you! You have been the curse of my life!’

‘Rather blame the evil passions which you have ever cherished,’ replied Zadok severely. ‘Rather censure the bad courses you have pursued; they are more in fault than me. I have enlightened this gentleman as to your true character, and he is now grateful to a protecting Providence that he was not ensnared by your designs.’

Valentine placed the pocket-book containing the money he had received from Mrs. Saville as a loan, and which he had not yet touched, upon the bed. Her hand closed round it, but as she grasped it an expression of intense rage convulsed her features, and she became again insensible.

When the doctor perceived this he regretted

that he had given any one permission to speak to his patient.

‘I must request you to be kind enough to withdraw, gentlemen,’ he exclaimed. ‘You have exceeded the limits I gave you, and your further stay in this room may be attended with perilous consequences.’

‘Is her life in danger?’ queried Zadok Heskisson.

‘I cannot say so with any certainty at present, but I fear that if she is greatly excited she may have brain fever, and that would very likely prove fatal.’

Valentine had made restitution: his honour had constrained him to do so. He wanted the money badly enough, but his gentlemanly instinct and honest feeling would not permit him to keep it after what he had heard. He called both the doctor and Zadok to witness that he had returned ten thousand pounds to Mrs. Saville, and by their request the police were communicated with, the money counted, and placed in their possession for the time being.

Having removed this load from his mind, Valentine took his leave, wondering much as to the mutability of human affairs, and thinking that he had had a lucky escape. Although he was poor and in embarrassed circumstances, he had his fair share of pride, and to have linked his ancient name and lineage with the daughter of a self-condemned felon would have been most excruciating to him.

He went home to his lady mother, who was very sorry to see the fair edifice she had erected knocked down into the dust and become as nothing;

yet she was glad that her son had been preserved from the—to her—awful danger of a *mésalliance*.

Zadok Hoskisson felt some sort of pity for Mrs. Saville when he found that she was dangerously ill, and he stayed with her and the nurse during the best part of the night. She was very ill, but the brain fever which the doctor dreaded had not yet made its appearance, though there were ample grounds for his assertion that it might do so at any moment. Towards morning she became conscious again, and her wild restless gaze at once settled upon Zadok. Her former life seemed to rush like a flood over her memory. She exclaimed, in a faint voice:

‘Old friend, come hither, I wish to speak to you. It is long since we first met; perhaps we are now together for the last time.’

‘The last?’ repeated Zadok.

‘Yes, it seems to me so. I have nothing now left to live for; my ambitious schemes are all defeated. I have made a hard fight with fortune.’

‘You have fought fortune with the wrong weapons.’

‘Never mind. I do not want you to heap reproaches upon me; I can do that myself. I am beaten. I acknowledge it. Treat me then with generosity. My name is blighted, my family scattered, my husband in gaol. To enumerate the sad catalogue drives me mad, but here—’

He took a chair by the bedside, and listened attentively.

‘Tell my daughter to go—’ she began, but breaking off abruptly, hesitated.

‘What would you say?’

‘No, no; why should I? I am not dying. Time enough to do that when they tell me there is no hope. Never mind, old friend. I thought I would give you a message for my daughter, but it will keep till another time.’

‘You may trust me.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘Please yourself.’

‘I fully intend to do so. Come, let us talk about ourselves; our children can live afterwards, and other people will think of them. I have not treated you well. Do you forgive me now you see my once proud spirit broken? Do you give me your pardon now that you are an eye-witness to the wretched and miserable state to which I am reduced?’

He made no reply.

‘You cannot bear animosity now. Look at me. I am beaten at all points, in spite of all my cleverness. Nothing remains to me but to die, and death is welcome as soon as it likes to come.’

‘I forgive you. Here’s my hand upon it,’ replied Zadok. ‘I cannot wish you worse or lower than you are.’

Two hands, one cold and clammy, the other hot and parched and feverish, met and clasped one another. Thus was the compact of reconciliation, or the award of mercy, call it what you will, sealed by these people, both of whom had their faults—one of whom had sinned deeply.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PRISON-CELL AND SICK-ROOM.

WHEN Michael Saville found that his father had escaped from his custody he feared to go back to his mother. Counting his money, he discovered that he had enough to carry him to America, and he resolved to go to that country. So he took the train to Liverpool, and there bought a passage to the United States.

Felicia was very much alarmed when she heard of her father's disappearance from Dr. Masterman Hall's surgery. There was an air of mystery about the whole affair which she was far from being able to understand. Her surprise, instead of diminishing, increased during the ensuing day, and she thought of going back to London, when a letter in her father's handwriting arrived :

With trembling hands she tore open the seal, and read the epistle, which began :

‘My dearest Daughter,—It is with the deepest regret that I write to tell you I have been consigned to a felon's prison. Do not start—read this letter calmly through, and you will see that if I have done wrong I have also made atonement, and in the following remarkable way.

‘Your mother induced me to rob the bank of which I was manager. Do not think that I mention this circumstance out of any cowardly wish to screen myself and throw the blame upon her. I only do so because I wish to put you fully in possession of all the circumstances which have brought me to Newgate.

‘I robbed the bank, and succeeded in reaching home without detection; but unhappily a young man who was employed in the bank had been there on the evening of the robbery, and suspicion fell upon him. He was committed for trial. Rather than let him suffer the penalty of the law, I resolved to give myself up, which I have done.

‘Perhaps the repentance which urged me to do so would never have been born had I not heard you reading the Bible one morning as I was going into the City.

‘May I beg of you, my dear child—dearer than ever now I am torn from you—to visit me in my confinement; will you also hasten to your mother, who, I am credibly informed, is in a precarious state?

‘What can I say in expiation for bringing all this misery upon you? Nothing!

‘I will pray—if God will hear the prayer of such a man as I am—that He to whom all hearts are open may reward the true virtue which dwells in you.—In tears, ever your own affectionate

‘FATHER.’

Felicia only read this letter once. There was no necessity for a repetition of the perusal. Her father was in want of her presence and assistance, and she would not withhold it from him. She would play the part of the comforter in the hour of need.

On her way to the station she called upon Dr. Masterman Hall, and in a few words made him acquainted with what had happened, whereat the worthy doctor was much astonished. In half an hour she was flying over the metals to London.

Her first visit was to her father. The officials admitted her to his cell, and she threw herself sobbingly on his neck.

‘O, my dear, dear father!’ she exclaimed, amidst a shower of tears, ‘how dreadful it is to see you here! My duty to my mother cannot restrain me from saying that if she were in such a place it would not be nearly so shocking, because her antecedents would have prepared her for such a contingency.’

‘Hush, my child!’ replied Mr. Saville gently, ‘we must not be censorious. I have incurred my doom, and I must not murmur. My only comforts are having, first of all, saved that noble young fellow Barclay from a long imprisonment, and secondly, that I have retained your love.’

‘You will be taken away from me,’ said Felicia.

‘Alas, yes!’

‘I shall not see you, and when I do it will be in a felon’s dress. O papa, if you had only been content with a little! What made you so grasping?’

‘Your mother urged me on.’

‘She has been your evil genius.’

‘That is true.’

Felicia endeavoured to do all in her power to raise her father’s spirits and cheer him up under his heavy infliction, none the less heavy because it was self-imposed, and he in his turn assumed a cheerful spirit—which he was far from feeling—in order to reassure the child of his age—the daughter whom he loved more than all the others.

On leaving her father Felicia continued her dull and dismal round of visits, and went to the inn where her mother lay dangerously ill. The

fever which the doctor had alluded to had made its appearance, and when Felicia arrived her parent was delirious.

Zadok Hoskisson was there, but Felicia did not remember him, though she had seen him in Australia, and he thought it best not to make himself known.

Felicia considered it her duty to nurse her mother, for in spite of all her faults and all her frailty, she was her mother, and she assumed that weighty task. Zadok, seeing that Mrs. Saville was in good hands, took his leave, and Felicia with the nurse alone remained.

The doctor came several times during the day, but did not think it requisite that he should stay all night; he contented himself with writing prescriptions and leaving directions with the anxious watchers.

The nurse soon discovered that Felicia was a relation, and her experience of sick-rooms was sufficient to tell her that relations always watched well. Consequently she thought her services could be dispensed with, and, sitting down upon a chair, she allowed herself to go to sleep. Felicia was not sorry to be rid of her. Every movement of Mrs. Saville's was closely watched by her, and she prepared to follow the doctor's orders to the letter. Towards midnight the wind got up, and howled over the house-tops and among the chimneys with a strange weird noise. The windows rattled and the wind forced itself through the chinks of the flooring, and inflated the carpet as if it had been a huge bladder or a balloon. The candles burnt low, and great black snuffs hung upon them, which Felicia rose to remove, when a sound from the

bed drew her back. Her mother was speaking. But she uttered nothing but the ravings of a delirious mind. Yet there was something in her incoherent talk which interested Felicia strangely. She bent over her mother so as to catch the hoarse tones which issued from her lips.

‘Fenwick—Maurice Fenwick! ha! ha! He is dead! No, no! Not dead, but worse than dead! That was my doing—mine—mine—mine! Ha! ha!’

Here she gave utterance to a demoniac laugh, which startled the old nurse in her armchair, and threw out her arms, clutching the empty air wildly with her hands.

‘Poor man!’ she continued, as her mood changed—‘poor man! If I die, tell Felicia to go to—to—yes, it was a fine poison—fine—fine—fine! Did he not say there was an antidote? Tell Felicia to go—’

She fell back, leaving the sentence uncompleted, and though Felicia bent over her for a full hour expectantly, not a sound issued from her closed lips.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A REVELATION.

To Felicia’s excited imagination the candles burned with a bluish flame, which imparted a strange sepulchral appearance to all the objects in the room. The nurse, tired, lazy, and indifferent, had suffered herself to fall into a heavy slumber, from which she occasionally woke with a start and

a cough. No fire burned in the grate. Without all was silent.

Mrs. Saville was restless and uneasy. She appeared to be altogether oblivious of her daughter's presence. Her eyes glared with a tigerish ferocity which was painful to witness. Now and then a change, which was singularly grateful to the solitary and anguished watcher, would come over the convulsed features of her mother, and serenity would usurp the place of passion, while peace took that of tempestuous storm.

As Felicia sat by the bedside wondering if her mother would speak again, she fancied that she saw shadows on the wall, which mocked and gibed at her, taking the forms of hideous demons, colossal and gigantic one minute, then sinking to the level of a dwarf, ungainly and elfin.

Suddenly her mother moved, and uttered some few incoherent words. Felicia sprang to her feet in a moment, and, as before, bent anxiously over the flushed face of the unconscious woman.

'There! there!' cried Mrs. Saville. 'Do you not all see him? Would to heaven you could see him as I do, and behold him with my eyes, which seem to be on fire at the sight! He sits upon the ground in a solitary chamber, turning his thumbs round one another and counting his fingers, with the sickly smile of hopeless idiotcy upon his face. Mark him well! how pallid his features, and how expressionless his face! His noble fire is quenched! And this is my work! Ha, ha! Who amongst you will say that I have not earned my title to the name of demon? If admission to your ranks be by works rather than by faith then am I one of ye. My work! Yes, yes. No one will dispute that!'

She paused. It was evident that she fancied herself in communication with some ghostly beings, to whom she was relating her exploits in crime. It was a ghastly revelation, and one to which Felicia listened with undisguised horror.

‘That is not all, my friends—for you will be my friends when I come amongst you, as I must surely do, having forfeited my title to a higher estate,’ Mrs. Saville resumed. ‘All! No, I would it were; and yet I know not. It is something to be audacious, even in crime. ’Twas I who made my husband rob the bank—a plan which was well conceived had he held his tongue. But these are nothing to the silencing of Fenwick!’

Here there was another pause, which Felicia, in her excitement, broke, exclaiming, ‘What of him?’

Mrs. Saville, still thinking, owing to the disordered state of her brain, that she was in conversation with beings of another world, replied,

‘You ask me what of him? Listen to the tale. ’Tis worth your while, for seldom has so great villainy been so successful. He loved my daughter, did this low-bred fellow—this chemist’s son—and to punish his presumption I thought I would make him an idiot for life. Ha, ha! You laugh! Well, I must perforce laugh, too, though my poor brain aches rackingly. Ha, ha!’

Felicia shuddered.

‘I went to a friend of mine, who gave me a drug—O, a rare drug!—and when Fenwick came to the ball I gave him all—all—every grain. Ha, ha! ’Twas well conceived and better executed!’

‘Tell me the name of the man you went to,’ said Felicia, in a tremulous voice, which she was unable to control.

‘His name? What was his name? How my poor head swims! What can have come to my memory? What *was* his name? How strange I cannot call it to mind! I shall be forgetting my own name next!’

For fully five minutes Mrs. Saville appeared to be engaged in the futile endeavour to collect her thoughts. At length she exclaimed, with a wild burst of confidence: ‘Listen, all of you—listen! I must not speak above a whisper, for there are those who would be glad to hear his name, which I have remembered at last.’

‘Why would they be glad to know it?’ asked Felicia, with an awful anxiety.

Mrs. Saville lowered her voice to its smallest compass, and replied, in a sibilant whisper:

‘Because there is an antidote, and they might go and get it from him.’

‘From whom?’

‘Alphonse—’

‘Yes.’

‘Alphonse—O, my poor head! What is his patronymic? O! O! How these shooting pains fly through me! They are like daggers!’

‘You said Alphonse.’

‘Ah, yes! Alphonse Pastille!’

Felicia offered up a fervent and hurried prayer to Heaven in gratitude for this great favour vouchsafed. She felt positive that nothing would have induced her mother when in her senses to have divulged this invaluable and dearly-cherished secret.

‘Where did you say he lived?’ she inquired.

‘Lived!’ repeated Mrs. Saville, as if she did not fully understand the import of the question.

‘Yes—what is his address?’

Mrs. Saville shook her head and made no answer. It was clear that her faculties were deserting her, and that she was incapable of pursuing that train of thought any further.

Felicia was unable to extract another word from her. She had, however, the inestimable consolation of having discovered that Maurice Fenwick’s intellect had been tampered with, that he was the victim of a skilfully concocted drug, and that Mrs. Saville had been mainly instrumental in administering the drug to him. In addition to that, she knew that the person who made the drug was called Alphonse Pastille, and that there was an antidote.

This was indeed glorious news—a magnificent revelation which was of the greatest value. She fondly hoped that it might end in Maurice Fenwick’s being restored to sanity and his friends.

Finding that her mother was not disposed to be communicative, Felicia abandoned the attempt to make her speak, though she would have given much to know the address of Alphonse Pastille, which she did not despair of discovering by other means.

At about three o’clock in the morning Mrs. Saville evidenced symptoms of the wildest excitement. She sprang from the bed and paced the room anxiously. Felicia endeavoured to soothe her, but in vain. She appeared to be unconscious of her presence. Thinking that if allowed her own way she would be calmer when the paroxysm wore off, Felicia contented herself with waking the nurse and watching her mother at a distance.

‘Lor, miss,’ said the nurse, rubbing her eyes

sleepily, 'she's stark, staring mad ! I've seen them that way often and often.'

'I am inclined to think it the result of delirium,' said Felicia.

'Not it, miss; it ain't no d'lirium—not a bit of it. She's taken leave of her senses. Let me ring the bell for the chambermaid. Our lives ain't safe !'

'Don't talk such nonsense, nurse,' replied Felicia. 'I am sure I shall not have the house disturbed at this time of night for nothing at all. When she has worn herself out she will, I have no doubt, go to sleep gently.'

'Well, miss, you're to command and it's for me to obey. I've had too much experience along of lunatics.'

Mrs. Saville's paroxysm showed no symptoms of abating. She continued to pace the room with considerable rapidity, talking to herself the while in a quick and jerky manner. After a short time she went to a chair upon which her clothes were lying, and proceeded to dress herself.

It was now that Felicia ought to have interfered, for it was evident the unhappy lady was not in any way mistress of her own actions, but by the exercise of mistaken kindness Felicia omitted to do so, and Mrs. Saville dressed herself without any interruption. The nurse was horrified at Felicia's apathy, which in her eyes was simply criminal. She held up her hands, and trusted that no evil might result from so foolish a course of action.

When Mrs. Saville had attired herself to her satisfaction she attempted to leave the room, but the nurse, unknown to Felicia, had locked the door and taken the key away. Finding herself baffled

she threw herself into a transport of rage, which gave way to fear.

She imagined that the fiends with whom she supposed herself to have been conversing had condemned her out of her own mouth, and were coming forward for the purpose of torturing her.

‘Ring the bell, miss—do ring it!’ cried the nurse, quaking with fright. ‘When they gets into their tantrums like they’re awful. *Do*, for heaven’s sake, ring the bell and rouse the house, or there’s no telling what the consequences will be!’

Thus urged Felicia did not see how she could reasonably refuse compliance. Going to the bell-rope she rang it violently, and the noise of the ring resounded throughout the corridor.

Mrs. Saville heard it, and was strangely disturbed.

‘They come! they come!’ she cried, stretching out her arms, as if to ward off some imaginary assailants. ‘O, they come! They come!’

She repeated these words monotonously, and then her mood changed. She became as furious as a caged lioness, and dashed herself against the door, hoping to open it. Her frantic efforts proved unavailing.

Felicia went up to her mother, and by the use of gentle phrases endeavoured to soothe her, but was unable to do so.

The mad woman—for she was no better—finding her exit by the door effectually prevented, rushed to the window. It was bolted. She undid the clasp and forced it back. Another effort threw the sash up.

The wall descended to the street perpendicularly for a length of five-and-thirty feet. Mrs.

Saville stood upon the dressing-table, knocking the glass on one side with a contemptuous gesture.

‘O, save her! save her!’ cried Felicia, bound to the spot by a mortal terror.

The nurse was incapable of motion.

A loud knocking was heard at the door. The energetic ringing had aroused the servants of the hotel. They wished to obtain admittance, and wondered why it was denied them.

Mrs. Saville craned her neck, and bending forward, peered into the street below. She drew back with an involuntary tremor.

‘Save her! Save her! For the love of heaven save her!’ Felicia continued to cry in the accents of despair.

The knocking at the door redoubled in intensity. Mrs. Saville took the noise to be an indication of the approach of the ministers of the fiend whom she dreaded so much.

While the door resisted the attacks of its assailants Mrs. Saville hesitated, but when a violent blow forced it from its hinges and sent it flying into the room, admitting a motley group of men and women variously attired, she uttered a scream—a death-cry, call it what you will—which rang in the ears of those who heard it for many a long year afterwards. Then she bent forward and plunged into the air, as she might have plunged into thirty feet of water. As she disappeared the spell which bound Felicia to the floor was broken. She ran to the window, and was just in time to see her mother fall with a dull thud upon the stones. Then she fell back in a swoon.

Mrs. Saville was picked up with her head fractured, and never spoke more.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ANTIDOTE.

THOUGH much shocked at the horrible fate which had overtaken her mother, Felicia had many things to do, and could not allow her grief to prostrate her utterly. Her mother was dead. She could answer no good purpose by watching over the senseless clay. It was time for her to be up and doing.

Her father had to be comforted, and, if possible, rescued from the fate with which he was threatened. Maurice Fenwick was languishing in a soul-deadening obscurity; but one man in the kingdom could cut asunder the bonds which bound his intellect in their fatal embrace, and that one man was named Alphonse Pastille. Where he lived was a problem Felicia had yet to solve.

When she had seen her mother's remains brought to the house and placed upon the bed from which she had so rashly risen, the brave-hearted girl drove back her tears, and prayed for the soul of her erring parent.

A few hours' sleep was snatched in an uneasy way by Felicia, who was thoroughly worn out and half-fainting with fatigue, and she rose refreshed.

Her first visit was to her father, to inform him of the melancholy event.

Mr. Saville received the news calmly, with an almost philosophic quietude of demeanour. Felicia next related to him the mysterious words of her mother uttered in the height of her delirium, and hazarded a conjecture that if Alphonse Pastille

could be discovered the unfortunate young man might be restored to his former state of sanity.

In this opinion Mr. Saville thoroughly concurred, but his mind was so full of recent events that he declared he could give her no practical hints for her guidance. Felicia took her leave, and for a moment thought herself abandoned to her own resources.

In this dilemma she bethought herself of Mortimer, and drove in a cab to the house in Berkeley Square, which had formerly been a fashionable mansion, but which was now the abode of a set of noisy unruly servants, who were inclined to commit every sort of roguery, and only prevented by the fact of Mortimer Saville being in the house. They had heard of the arrest of their master on a criminal charge, but they did not yet know that their late imperious mistress was dead. Felicia could not conceal from herself the fact that the servants who had once been so obsequious and so dutiful sneered at her as they opened the door, with scarcely the slightest pretence at civility.

One footman, whose hair was elaborately powdered, informed her that Mr. Mortimer was up-stairs in the drawing-room.

Unprecedented by the pampered menial and unannounced, she ascended the broad staircase and entered the room.

Mortimer, who since the disgraceful revelation of his father's guilt had thought it advisable to leave the Bellicose Department of the Belligerent Office, was lying upon a sofa, smoking with a vicious force at a long cigar, which emitted the fine flavour of a Havannah well made and well kept.

He rose in a hurried manner as his sister entered, and running to meet her, grasped her hand warmly, saying, 'Thank heaven, you have come. I was dying for news of some sort, however meagre.'

In a few words Felicia told him all.

For a time he was silent, then he said,

'This *exposé* is very sad for us: it is worse for you perhaps than for me: my determination is taken. When restitution is made to the bank, if such a thing is contemplated, there will be something left—a few thousands—enough to enable you to live comfortably. I have a letter in my pocket from Michael, saying that he has gone to America to take service in the Federal army. I shall follow him. Perhaps,' he added, with a reckless laugh, 'a bullet may put me out of my misery, or an officer's uniform may console me for my father's shortcomings. I cannot stop in England.'

Felicia endeavoured by every means in her power to combat this resolution, but without avail.

Having communicated the more weighty portion of her news, she spoke about Maurice Fenwick, in reply to which Mortimer said, 'What did you say the fellow's name was?'

'Alphonse Pastille.'

'And you want to know where he lives?'

'O, yes, so much.'

'Well, what is more easy? We must turn over the leaves of the "Post Office Directory." Pastille, Edouard. That ain't it. Your swell's called Alphonse. Pastille, Adrian. Wrong again. Now we have him. Pastille, Alphonse, Soho Square, perfumer.'

Felicia held up her hands thankfully.

‘I’ll just see you through this little trouble, Feely,’ continued her brother. ‘I should be glad to give him a lift if I had it in my power. I never considered the fellow a gentleman. but he is better than nothing, as you are now.’

‘O, Mortimer,’ said Felicia, reddening, ‘how can you talk to me like that! I will not have your assistance now. It is shameful of you to insult a poor fellow whom mamma has wronged so dreadfully.’

‘You may please yourself about having my assistance,’ replied Mortimer coolly. ‘Recent events have upset me and made me feel a little brutish. I can’t help it. It’s not my fault.’

With a sigh Felicia turned away.

Mortimer did not attempt to restrain her. He let her go without one word of farewell.

He thought of her afterwards, and of the unfeeling way in which he had permitted her, his only sister, to leave him—thought of her on many a battle-field in the Far West; thought of her when the fire of musketry was sharp and brisk, and the cannons roared awfully; thought of her when he lay wounded to the death upon the blood-stained field.

Felicia had only one object in view now, and that was to restore Maurice Fenwick to sanity. Having done that—having placed the antidote in Dr. Masterman Hall’s hands—she thought of entering a convent, and devoting the remainder of her life to abstinence and prayer.

Her father was virtually dead to her; her mother would soon be in the grave; her brothers had turned their backs upon her, and all for no

fault of her own. She was the football of Fate. If she was a little morbid, much excuse was to be made for her.

Alphonse Pastille was easily discovered in his shop in Soho Square. He wore a velvet skull-cap and a white apron, which denoted that he had been busily at work during the morning.

When Felicia intimated that she wished to speak to him privately and apart from his assistants, he said, 'Will miss please to walk this way? I am much at miss's service, but I apologise for being in *déshabillé*.'

Felicia went into a room which had a door with a glass window carefully draped, to prevent prying eyes and ears from penetrating the secrets of the interior.

'I have been sent here, Mr. Pastille,' began Felicia, 'by a lady to whom you sold a powder of a peculiar description.'

'How can I identify the lady?' queried the perfumer. 'My customers are numerous.'

'If I describe the drug, perhaps you will recall the circumstance,' said Felicia.

'Possibly.'

'The drug was of the most peculiar character. It had the tremendous power of being able to take away the intellectual powers of the person to whom it was administered, and make him an idiot, doting and drivelling.'

'Ah! ah!' said Alphonse Pastille, smiling grimly, and nodding his head. 'I have heard of such a drug, miss, but I do not keep it. O no! I am simply a perfumer, and no chemist of any skill.'

He did not know whether his fair visitor was a *bonâ-fide* customer or a police spy.

‘It is not the drug I want, but the antidote,’ said Felicia, in an agony of apprehension.

‘Ah, I may have that in my shop, but—’

‘What?’

‘Miss is prepared to pay well for it.’

Up to the present time Felicia had not thought about money. She was, however, well provided with the circulating medium, and in addition to her stock of gold and bank-notes she had a store of ornaments. Not wishing to part with all her ready money, she hastily divested herself of her bracelets and rings, which, together with her watch and chain, she laid upon the table.

‘There!’ she cried. ‘They shall all be yours if you will give me the antidote.’

The chemist looked up astonished. Then he rose from his seat and approached the table, peering carefully into the ornaments.

‘I must leave you for a moment,’ he said. ‘Pardon my absence, miss. I accept your offer, and will return with that you wish for.’

O, how her heart throbbed ecstatically when she heard the glad and blissful tidings!

Maurice Fenwick would be himself again, and the dreadful load which had oppressed her for so long a time would be lifted.

But a short time elapsed before Alphonse Pastille made his reappearance, and when he did he held in his hand a box of rather large dimensions; raising the top, he disclosed about a dozen lozenge-shaped pills of a dark colour.

‘This box,’ he exclaimed, ‘contains what you are in search of. I have the honour, miss, to wish you a very good morning.’

Felicia eagerly grasped the box, and put it

under her shawl; hastily murmuring her thanks, she made an inclination of the head, and left the shop. A cab took her to the railway-station, and at half-past three she was in the express train on her way to Bath, her heart full of blissful aspirations, conscious of having done a good deed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REUNITED.

DR. MASTERMAN HALL was rejoiced to see Felicia, and pleasure sparkled from the good old man's face when he heard that she had the antidote to the virulent poison which the unscrupulous Mrs. Saville had not hesitated to employ.

'I was always of opinion,' he said, 'that the poor young man had been unfairly dealt with. Nothing will give me greater pleasure, my dear young lady, than to restore him to his friends in his normal condition of mind. Perhaps the cure will be gradual. Shall you return to your old lodgings, or will you have sufficient courage to come with me to the asylum?'

'I will go with you, doctor. If I am weak and nervous you must forgive me. I am only a woman, and I have had so much to try me lately.'

'That was one reason why I thought you would be better away from the asylum,' replied Dr. Hall; 'but if you think yourself strong enough—'

'O, yes, yes. I cannot be away from him. I love him so,' replied Felicia, while a deep blush suffused her pale cheek.

The doctor smiled.

‘It is always so with young people,’ he muttered; adding aloud, ‘shall I telegraph to his friends, and tell them that their presence is requested? It is useless to raise hopes which may never be realised.’

‘O, don’t say that,’ cried Felicia; ‘the antidote must be the right one. I will not have you doubt its efficacy for a moment. Come, let us go at once, and put it to the test.’

‘Very well,’ answered Dr. Hall, who ordered his carriage, in which he with his fair visitor embarked.

It was some time before the large iron spike-studded gates leading to the asylum were passed, and the vehicle drew up to the door.

Felicia was ushered into the large room in which she had seen Maurice Fenwick before.

Dr. Masterman Hall was soon joined by his brother, who greeted him cordially, and explained the object of his visit, at which the mad doctor was vastly surprised. When he examined the box containing the antidote he said:

‘It is my opinion that the cure is intended to be gradual, or all these pills would not have been given. There are a dozen of them. Possibly a fortnight may elapse before the cure is completed. Leave them with me, and I will do my best, and send you a bulletin every day, saying how the patient is.’

‘Very well. I think no better arrangement can be come to,’ replied Dr. Masterman Hall, ‘though there is a young lady here who, no doubt, longs for the days of magic and magicians.’

His brother smiled, and cast a glance of sympathy upon Felicia.

When Felicia was informed that nothing could be done at present, she resigned herself with an ill grace to the inevitable, and returned to Bath with her friend and protector.

‘I owe you many, many thanks, Dr. Hall,’ she exclaimed. ‘You have been very, very kind to me. I shall never forget your kindness were I to live a thousand years.’

The doctor pressed her hand and hurried away. He had learnt her history from herself, who had given him a full and truthful account of all the recent events which had occurred.

One day she did not see him; he had gone to town upon important business, his servant said, when she knocked at the door on her way to the church, to hear the morning services, at which she was in the habit of attending.

It was quite late in the evening when he returned—nearly ten o’clock, in fact, just as she was about laying down *Thomas à Kempis* and thinking of retiring to rest.

‘It’s all right, my dear young lady,’ he exclaimed in his bluff, hearty manner. ‘I couldn’t resist coming to tell you to-night, because I knew you would sleep all the better for it.’

‘What do you mean? Is Maurice—’

‘No, no. I’m not talking about Maurice. I told you that would be a work of time, and a week has not yet passed over his head, but your father.’

‘Indeed! I was not aware that you had interested yourself in his welfare,’ said Felicia, who, in spite of her dutiful affection for her father, could not help feeling a little disappointed.

‘With your permission, Miss Saville, I’ll take

a chair and ring for a glass of wine,' said Dr. Masterman Hall. 'I have been travelling for some time.'

Felicia took some wine from the cheffonier and supplied the worthy man's wants, after which he continued:

'I took the liberty of going to town to do what I could for your father. My first visit was to Lord Linstock, upon whom I prevailed to see the directors of the bank, and ask them in consideration of the stolen money being returned to withdraw from the prosecution, as they all had the greatest respect for Mr. Sandford Saville before this lamentable affair took place.'

'They will not prosecute him?'

'No. He has promised to refund the money, and he will be liberated on his own recognisances to come up for judgment when called upon.'

'I shall see him then shortly?'

'In a week's time.'

'O, doctor, Providence must have raised you up to be our friend in the hour of need. What do I not owe you!'

Dr. Masterman Hall did not like ostentatious gratitude; he disliked being thanked. So gulping down his wine, he put on his hat, and making some remark as to the lateness of the hour took his leave.

Some ten days afterwards Felicia, at the urgent request of Dr. Hall, went to the Park to hear the Hanoverian band play. He advised her to take exercise and to allow herself some relaxation.

While Felicia was sitting upon a rustic seat shading herself from the heat, she suddenly started.

Dr. Masterman Hall was approaching. Who was that with him?

Maurice! No, it could not be—and yet those features, those eyes, that haughty carriage redeemed by a gentle smile. That face as she remembered it in days of yore. O, heaven, it was too much happiness!

A form rushed forward and clasped her trembling frame in its manly arms.

‘Make way there! Air, air! A lady has fainted! Give her air! Stand on one side!’

It was, indeed, Maurice Fenwick, once more a rational being, hanging over the body of his beloved, able to understand her intense devotion and to know that for a time his intellect had been asleep, but her exertions had caused it to awake and put on all its pristine glory.

Away from the turmoil of the world, in a pretty cottage on the wildest part of the coast of the Isle of Wight, live three people. They are named severally Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick and Mr. Saville. The latter is prematurely aged, but he has the utmost love for his daughter and son-in-law.

Those three prove by their loving intercourse that Arcadian bliss is not mythical, and that there are other things to live for besides money and worldly distinction.

THE END.

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